

TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF PREACHING AND COUNSELING:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE EPISTEMOLOGY COMMON TO GESTALT THERAPY
AND JESUS' PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

by

Harold Morrison Cowart

A professional project
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Ministry
The School of Theology at Claremont
May 1980

This professional project, completed by

Harold Morrison Cowart,

*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty
of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of*

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Faculty Committee

Paul Schurman

Eric L. Fitch

April 11, 1980
Date

David Knapp
Dean

PREFACE

Having been in the parish ministry for fourteen years, I have experienced the frustration and struggle of living in two worlds--the world of how I conceived things ought to be and the world of things as they are. As a result of this dichotomy, I operated mostly out of a "victim" or "if only" mentality. Needless to say, I did not find much joy or fulfillment in my ministry.

About nine years ago, during a crisis period in my ministry, I read Viktor Frankl's book, Man's Search for Meaning. His concept of freedom as involving the freedom to assume a certain attitude toward one's life was to have a profound impression on me.

As I wrestled with my inability to exercise even that much freedom, I chanced to pick up a book on Gestalt Therapy and began reading and practicing the awareness exercises. I soon became aware of the fact that I had much internal conflict and confusion. This further led to a most frightening dream and a workshop encounter with John Enright, Gestalt Therapist from San Francisco. He led me to reexperience the dream and move beyond the impasse which I experienced as a kind of rebirth.

I have continued in group therapy with The Rev. Kenneth Whitney, Gestalt Therapist with the Episcopal Diocese of Phoenix, Arizona. It is through the patient work with Father Whitney that I have continued on the journey from dependency to autonomy, and have found fulfillment in my ministry.

I am further indebted to Dr. Eric Titus and Dr. Paul Schurman who through their courses in New Testament and Pastoral Counseling respectively, have helped me crystalize my thinking with regard to this project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	vi
CHAPTER	PAGE
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
Importance of the Problem.....	1
Thesis Statement.....	3
Definition of Major Terms.....	5
Gestalt.....	5
Gestalt Therapy.....	6
Impasse.....	6
Kingdom of God.....	7
Myth.....	7
Work Previously Done in the Field.....	8
Scope and Limitations of the Project.....	10
Procedure for Integration.....	11
Chapter Outline.....	11
II EPISTEMOLOGY AND THEORY OF GESTALT THERAPY.....	13
Knowledge in Gestalt Therapy.....	13
Knowledge as Awareness.....	13
Knowledge as Process.....	16
Theory of Gestalt Therapy.....	19
Gestalt Formation.....	19
Gestalt.....	19
Figure and Ground.....	19
Contact in Gestalt.....	20
Homeostasis.....	21
Contact Boundary.....	22
Resistances in Gestalt Therapy.....	24
Layers of Neurosis.....	25
The Role of the Therapist.....	28
Forms of Assistance.....	31
Introjection.....	31
Projection.....	32
Confluence.....	34
Retroflection.....	35
Two Gestalt Therapy Sessions.....	37
Session #1.....	37
Session #2.....	41
Summary.....	46

CHAPTER	PAGE
III	EPISTEMOLOGY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS PROCLAIMED BY JESUS..... 47
	Epistemology in Context: A Review of Theological Developments..... 48
	Greek vs. Hebrew Thought: An Overview..... 48
	Faith vs. Reason..... 49
	Origins of the Kingdom of God Debate..... 53
	Friederich Schleiermacher..... 53
	Albrecht Ritschl..... 54
	Johannes Weiss..... 55
	Albert Schweitzer..... 58
	Kingdom of God in Jewish Literature..... 60
	Kingdom of God as Proclaimed by Jesus..... 66
	Kingdom of God in the Parables of Jesus..... 69
	Summary..... 71
IV	GESTALT THERAPY AS A WAY OF INTEGRATING THE THEOLOGY OF PREACHING AND COUNSELING..... 72
	Gestalt Therapy: A Bridge Between Preaching and Counseling..... 73
	Implications for Preaching..... 76
	Implications for Pastoral Counseling..... 77
	Awareness Function..... 78
	Enabling Function..... 79
	Supportive Function..... 80
	Summary..... 81
V	CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS..... 82
	Theological Implications..... 83
	Epistemological Implications..... 84
	Methodological Implications..... 85
	Summary..... 86
	BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 87

ABSTRACT

This project attempts to explore the epistemology that is common to Gestalt Therapy and Jesus' proclamation concerning the kingdom of God and out of this develop a biblical theology that is congruent with both preaching and pastoral counseling. The assumption of the project is that most pastors counsel from one theological stance and preach from another. The theological stance that underlies the project is based on a Barthian understanding of revelation. We don't discover who God is by our reason. We encounter God through the scriptures as the one who is revealed. It is here that we discover the God of Abraham who is active and in process as opposed to the static being of Greek philosophy.

Through an explication of the theory of Gestalt Therapy knowledge is seen as going beyond insight or reason. Knowledge is that which breaks into one's existence, creating a new possibility. It involves more than simply a restructuring of the past. Two Gestalt Therapy sessions are included as a demonstration of how one comes to knowledge in therapy.

The starting point for a genuine biblical theology is found in Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God. Through the work of Norman Perrin, the kingdom of God is understood as having a previous history among the Hebrew people based on God's activity as king. God's kingship is understood through his activity on their behalf at decisive points in their history. By the time of Jesus the Jewish people had come to expect a final act of God on their behalf. Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God as God's reign present in his life and ministry and also yet to come.

It is not a reality within history but stands over against history as judgment and also as the possibility of authentic history.

Both preaching and counseling are seen as forms of proclamation within the context of Jesus' proclamation of the in-breaking of God's kingdom. A counseling model is developed based on Jesus' ministry to persons.

The conclusion of the project is that Gestalt Therapy provides a way of achieving a congruent biblical theology for both preaching and counseling.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The problem addressed by this paper concerns the relationship between Gestalt Therapy and Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God and how this relationship can help solve what might be called an identity crisis for pastoral counseling.

Importance of the Problem

Throughout the history of Christianity, pastoral counseling has looked to other philosophies to provide a methodology for the care of souls. In primitive Christianity Gnosticism and then later on Stoicism provided a framework for the care of souls. These then gave way to Neo-Platonism as articulated by St. Augustine. Neo-Platonism with its dualism of soul and body informed pastoral care for much of the Middle Ages.¹ The methodology for pastoral care in this context was one of rigorous discipline of the body in order that the soul might achieve salvation. The soul was seen as imprisoned in the body and the individual had to wage a constant battle against the evils of the flesh.

Today pastoral counseling finds itself confronted with a plethora of what Don Browning calls "therapeutic and quasi-therapeutic"²

¹William Clebsch and Charles Jaekle, Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 77.

²Don S. Browning, "New Trends in Pastoral Care: The Search for Method in Religious Living", Christian Century, SX, 31 (September 5, 1973), p. 849.

schools and techniques from which to choose. These include Carl Rogers' client-centered therapy based on Neo-Reformation theology of the 50's, Eric Berne who was popularized by Thomas Harris in the best-selling book, I'm Ok, You're Ok,³ William Glasser who introduced "Reality Therapy" and Fritz Perls who founded "Gestalt Therapy". Howard Clinebell's book, Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling,⁴ discusses some of these therapies and their relevance to pastoral counseling.

For the pastor, who has the task of proclaiming the good news and counseling troubled persons, it is important that his/her preaching and counseling complement each other. Thomas Oden points to this problem when he says:

When we are honest with ourselves as Protestant pastors and counselors, we often find ourselves involved in an inconsistency. We preach on the assumption that salvation is a gift of God and we counsel on the assumption that salvation is a type of Socratic achievement of insight.⁵

I believe that preaching and counseling need not be mutually exclusive areas. Each can learn from and strengthen the other. Then the church will be able to experience the proclamation of the "good news" as therapeutic and counseling as the proclamation of a new possibility for authentic existence.

³Thomas A. Harris, M.D., I'm Ok--You're Ok: A Practical Guide to Transactional Analysis (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

⁴Howard J. Clinebell, Jr. Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966).

⁵Thomas Oden, Kerygma and Counseling (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 21.

Thesis Statement

My thesis is that a common epistemology is at the heart of both Gestalt Therapy and the life of faith that is a response to Jesus' proclamation concerning the Kingdom of God.

Until the time of Karl Barth, theology had claimed that apart from faith persons could reason or postulate the existence of God from natural categories. In the theology of Thomas Aquinas, he argued that one could arrive at the existence of God through what he called an analogy of being. The argument works thusly:

Whatever perfection is analogically common to two or more beings is intrinsically (formally) possessed by each, not, however, by any two in the same way or mode, but by each in proportion to its being. Since God participates in being perfectly, He is knowable analogically from the knowledge of any being in which He participates.⁶

Barth issued a resounding Nein! against all forms of natural theology in the publication of his Der Römerbrief.⁷ According to Barth, we know God at the point where He chooses to reveal Himself. The God of biblical faith constantly breaks into our world and shatters our pre-conceived notions. In the coming of the Messiah, the traditional expectations were shattered by the poverty and simplicity of a baby born in a stable. All our reasonings about God if they are to be true to biblical faith must begin with God's self-disclosure. We know because we are known by God.

⁶Ibid., p. 131.

⁷Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

Christian faith is based on the belief that in the life of Jesus, God was present encountering persons and inviting them to submit to His rule. The symbol⁸ Kingdom of God points those who stand in the faith tradition to God's activity on behalf of the people of Israel and reveals to those who are open to God's revelation that in the life of Jesus, in his preaching, teaching and healing ministry, God's power and rule is "breaking-in", making possible an authentic life of faith. One comes to this knowledge only through the surrender of one's self-understanding for a new perspective which is a gift of God. This finds expression in the paradoxical saying of Jesus: "For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."⁹ Paul expressed this revelation of God as dying to self and rising to new life in Christ.

In Gestalt Therapy there is no explicit reference to God or the Christian understanding of existence. However, there is an epistemological kinship. Knowledge in Gestalt Therapy is more than the accumulation of information. In the therapeutic process which is an I-Thou encounter with the therapist one comes to awareness. According to Perls the basic therapeutic dilemma is that the patient has lost awareness of the way he/she alienates certain functions of the self.¹⁰ By using techniques of directed awareness, Perls taught people how to learn.

⁸Norman Perrin, Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 29ff.

⁹Mark 8:35 (RSV).

¹⁰F. S. Perls, et al., Gestalt Therapy (New York: Julian Press, 1951), p. 73ff.

There is a paradox in Gestalt Therapy. You don't change behavior by trying harder. The goal is not self-improvement but awareness of the self in its total relation to the environment. The paradox is that change does take place due to the fact that the individual experiences how he/she blocks awareness. The goal in working with people is to enable them to let go of whatever controlling mechanisms they use and allow organismic self-regulation to function. This letting-go and experiencing the process often leads to what is called the "aha" experience. Perls described this process as "losing one's mind and coming to one's senses."¹¹ The knowledge that one gets from the experience is not available apart from the experience. It breaks into the person's experience as revelation. Perls described Gestalt Therapy as leading a person to their death. "To suffer one's death and to be reborn is not easy."¹²

Definition of Major Terms

Gestalt. A German word for which there is no English equivalent. The closest definition is whole or configuration. In the language of Gestalt the objective-subjective dichotomy is overcome. In a very practical way it was discovered that in visual perception an object is not merely making an impression on the lens of the eye. A person literally forms his/her world by collecting bits and pieces of what is available and forms them into a configuration or whole.

¹¹F. S. Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim (Moab, UT: Real People Press, 1969), p. 53.

¹²Ibid., from the outside cover.

This whole is made up of a figure against a background. This is a dynamic interplay between figure and ground. A figure may lose interest and become background, allowing some other aspect of the configuration to emerge.

Gestalt Therapy. A dynamic process that takes place between the patient and the therapist. It is an "I-Thou" encounter with emphasis on the here and now. One of the ground rules in Gestalt Therapy is that the patient must constantly stay in the present. The therapist focuses attention on what is happening, how the patient is experiencing what is happening. The therapist doesn't delve into the past or seek to find out the "why" of behavior. A past happening or a future fantasy may emerge but it is not dealt with in terms of the past or future but the present situation. By paying careful attention to the patient, the therapist serves as a kind of "mid-wife", facilitating the movement from dependency on the environment to organismic self-support.

Impasse. A crucial point for growth in Gestalt Therapy. Perls calls it the phony, phobic area.¹³ It is called by the Russians the sick point. In therapy it is the point where environmental support is not forthcoming and authentic self-support has not been achieved. In order to achieve environmental support the patient will try to manipulate the therapist into doing his work for him. The therapist seeks to make the patient aware of how he avoids the pain of maturing and this phobic behavior is worked on until the person makes the breakthrough into authentic self-support.

¹³Ibid., p. 31.

Kingdom of God. According to Norman Perrin, it is not an idea or concept but a symbol.¹⁴ It has deep roots in the Jewish consciousness of themselves as God's people. It was taken over by the Israelites from the Canaanites where it went back to the ancient Sumerians. It makes use of a myth in which God was described as acting as King in creating the world. Perrin says that this was combined with a concept of salvation history dating from the period of the monarchy.¹⁵ In this way, God is understood as having acted on their behalf at certain periods in their history. By the time of Jesus it had come to represent the expectation of a final act of God on their behalf.

Myth. A vehicle in the New Testament for treating the activity of God as an observable reality alongside other events. When referring to the Kingdom of God, Perrin uses a definition which is a quote of Alan Watts by Philip Wheelwright. It is "a complex of stories--some fact and some fantasy--" which the Israelites regarded as describing the "inner meaning of the universe and of life".¹⁶ In the Israelites' understanding of the world, God had acted on their behalf and would continue to do so. According to Perrin the symbol Kingdom of God had the power of evoking the myth by which they understood themselves as the people of God.¹⁷ To ask of a myth, "Did it happen?" is to ask the wrong question. Rather, one asks, "What is the meaning of the myth?".

¹⁴Perrin, p. 33.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 23.

Work Previously Done in the Field

There is not a great body of literature that has been published which attempts to integrate Gestalt principles as they appear in therapy to Christian faith and theology. James L. Walker's book, Body and Soul,¹⁸ points to ways that Gestalt Therapy can shed light on several essential aspects of religious experience. One of the areas that Gestalt Therapy sheds light on is the mind-body, soul-body split that has become such an integral part of the Western mind-set. The aim of Gestalt Therapy is to overcome the mind-body dichotomy. In Gestalt, we do not possess or have a soul or a mind or a body. We are a totality of functions. The center of personality for Gestalt, the emotions, the feelings, the spirit, makes up what in early Hebraic thought was the soul. Soul in Hebraic thought is not something but is a relational metaphor. God breathes into the body the breath of life and man/woman becomes a living whole. In this sense, humans are no different from animals who also can be said to be soul. The faith of ancient Israel was an existentialist, here-and-now, holistic faith. For Walker, there are other areas in which Gestalt Therapy can shed light on the Christian understanding of existence.

Ward A. Knights, Jr.¹⁹ enumerates the resources in Gestalt Therapy that can be of help in pastoral counseling. He quotes Wilson Van Dusen who said that Gestalt Therapy unites existential theory with

¹⁸J. L. Walker, Body and Soul: Gestalt Therapy and Religious Experience (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971).

¹⁹Ward A. Knights, Jr., "Gestalt Therapy and Pastoral Counseling", Pastoral Counselor, V, I (Spring 1967), pp. 16-21.

a phenomenological approach.²⁰ This means that existentialism as a philosophy that has informed Christian theology can now take on practical implications in the context of the therapeutic relationship. It also means that phenomenology can now be taken seriously in the community of faith. Knights concludes that Gestalt Therapy can help to revitalize the religious community so that faith becomes a way of life rather than simply a preserver of traditions.

In a dissertation, Eric Hunter Beaumont²¹ has dealt with the impasse resolution in Gestalt Therapy as a religious process. He relates the process of impasse resolution to the process of conversion in the theology of Paul. In the impasse, one is stuck between moving from environmental support to self-support. Since environmental support is not forthcoming and the individual has not developed authentic self-support, it is an area of confusion, chaos and fear for the person. The patient attempts to manipulate the therapist to rescue him. However, the therapist refuses, keeping him/her in the impasse until there is a breakthrough to genuine self-support. In Pauline theology, man seeks to complete his life in terms of his own resources. In this process, the person experiences alienation from himself as he strives to do good by keeping the law. Through the process of being right-wised in Christ, he finds that he dies to his old self and becomes a new creature.

²⁰Ibid., p. 17.

²¹Eric Hunter Beaumont, "Gestalt Therapy Impasse Resolution as a Religious Process", Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, School of Theology at Claremont, 1976.

In this project, I propose to push the inquiry in the direction of suggesting that Gestalt Therapy is a kind of proclamation since it doesn't deal with merely teaching people to cope with their problems, but proclaims a new possibility of existing authentically in the world, and that proclamation can assume primacy in the preaching and counseling ministry of the church. The style of Jesus was proclamation. Even the teachings of Jesus must be seen in the context of the proclamation concerning the breaking-in of God's reign. The imperative follows from the indicative of what God is doing. In this way, preaching and counseling can be grounded in biblical theology and more aware of their common task of proclaiming the good news of God's redemptive presence in the world.

Scope and Limitations of the Project

Because of the nature of this project, I am limiting myself to the way Gestalt Therapy can serve as an integrative force for preaching and pastoral counseling only. Obviously, there are many other implications for the life of the church such as administration, education and social ethics, to name a few.

In dealing with Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God, I will be relying exclusively on the extensive work that Norman Perrin has done in that area. I believe that his work takes into account all the significant work by other scholars in that area.

My attempt at an integration of the two areas of biblical theology and Gestalt Therapy will be done from the perspective of a pastoral counselor. As a pastoral counselor, I have personally sensed the frustration of preaching grace and counseling as though salvation

is by works. In the scope of this paper, if I can bring some illumination and theological stability to the area of pastoral counseling, I will feel a sense of accomplishment. Thus, the area of pastoral counseling can avoid the scylla and charybdis of what Don Browning calls "the capriciousness of fadism and the stultification of moralism and formalism".²²

Procedure for Integration

In an attempt to bring theological clarity to the area of pastoral counseling, the methodology to be used will be descriptive and evaluative. Through an exploration of the sources of both Gestalt Therapy and Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God, I will demonstrate the epistemology that is common to each. This will include an evaluation of two Gestalt Therapy sessions as examples of the way one comes to know.

Chapter Outline

Chapter I is the Introduction and deals with the importance of the problem, the thesis, scope and limitation and method for integration.

Chapter II is an explication of the theory and ground rules for Gestalt Therapy. It concludes with an evaluation of two Gestalt Therapy sessions.

Chapter III explores epistemology within the context of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God.

²²Browning, p. 851.

Chapter IV focuses on Gestalt Therapy as a way of integrating the theology of preaching and counseling. It also includes a counseling model consistent with Gestalt Therapy and the way Jesus dealt with persons.

Chapter V is the conclusion with implications for Gestalt Therapy on theology, epistemology and methodology as they relate to preaching and counseling.

CHAPTER II

EPISTEMOLOGY AND THEORY OF GESTALT THERAPY

The purpose of this chapter will be to delve into the problem of how a person comes to knowledge in Gestalt Therapy. The theory of Gestalt Therapy will be explored within this epistemological framework. Then two Gestalt Therapy sessions will be examined as examples of how awareness functions in the therapy setting to produce existential knowledge as opposed to objective knowledge.

KNOWLEDGE IN GESTALT THERAPY

Knowledge as Awareness

First of all, we must understand that knowledge from the Gestalt perspective does not relate primarily to the accumulation of facts or data. In keeping with its existential orientation facts or data must be integrated with one's awareness. Perls has described the process of therapy as "losing one's mind and coming to one's senses".¹ At times, in error, this has been taken to mean that thinking is not a part of Gestalt Therapy. In making this statement, Perls was calling for an integration of the total experience of the individual--thinking, feeling and actions. He saw people whose thinking was not integrated with their experience. As a result of seeing people who were alienated from their own experience of life, Perls sought to get people in touch with the totality of their experience. For Perls this was his understanding of

¹F. S. Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, (Moab, UT: Real People Press, 1969), p. 53.

what constitutes reality. He defines reality as "the awareness of on-going experience, actual touching, seeing, moving, doing".² For him everything else was to be considered maya or illusion.

Awareness vs. Insight. It is important to distinguish between "awareness" and "insight" in Gestalt Therapy. Insight can happen through awareness and in this case is very similar to the "aha" experience. Awareness as lively contact with both the organism and the environment always has an element of spontaneity and freshness. Awareness which is not experienced as fresh and new probably indicates that a person is replaying a fantasy rather than tending to awareness of actual experience.³

Awareness in the context of Gestalt Therapy always involves a risk, a venture into the unknown, because one is never sure what the outcome will be. Where this is not true whatever insight may occur is no more than introspection. In introspection the self is split; one part is looking at another part as object.⁴ Awareness is spontaneous and effortless as opposed to introspection which is forced concentration. A person may make the remark, "I had to force myself to pay attention to the speaker". In this kind of forced introspection spontaneous awareness cannot develop and one ends up simply rehashing the past.

²Ibid., p. 50.

³John B. Enright, "An Introduction to Gestalt Techniques", in Joen Fagan and Irma Lee Shepherd (eds.) Gestalt Therapy Now (Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books, 1970), p. 118.

⁴Ibid., p. 119.

An absolutely healthy person is completely in touch with himself/herself and with reality.⁵ In Perls terminology what we label mind, he calls fantasy. Fantasy is that activity whereby we attempt to relieve the anxiety between the now and the then. When a person engages in this kind of activity he/she cuts himself/herself off from the future and from any possibility of growth or spontaneity.

There are three levels of awareness according to Perls. There is awareness of self, awareness of the world, and awareness of what's between, this intermediate zone of fantasy that prevents a person from being in touch with either himself/herself or the world. This is where our prejudices come from. We relate to ourselves and the world through a predetermined image or concept that we have. Contact with people or the world is always through this intermediate zone of prejudice. When we cease to be aware and experience ourselves or the world as they are given to us then intuition is replaced by intellect.⁶ At this point, we are no longer in contact with the total field of experience that is available to us with the experience of excitement that comes from interaction. What was intended to be process has become structure. A person has become a robot, living by abstract principles and Procrustean-like imposes his/her standards upon experience, negating or chopping off his/her own experience as being invalid.

Knowledge comes then by increasing awareness. We must empty out the intermediate zone of fantasy or maya that we carry with us in

⁵Perls, p. 50.

⁶Joel Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book (New York: Julian Press, 1973), p. 116.

order that we might be in touch with reality. In therapy a person comes to distinguish between fantasy and reality and often has what Perls called the "aha" experience or the experience of waking up. The goal in therapy is to "diffuse" the middle zone of awareness, the fantasy zone, so that a person is more in contact with himself/herself and the world.

The procedure for doing this in therapy is rather simple. A continuum of awareness is established so that a person can work on the foremost principle of Gestalt: what he/she carries around as unfinished business will emerge and can be dealt with as it emerges.

Knowledge as Process

Gestalt Therapy views all of life as process. This represents a distinct break from the Freudian approach to therapy which was based on a cause/effect principle. This cause/effect principle developed philosophically from Platonic thought which was an attempt to get at the essence of things. Theologically this formed the basis of the attempt of medieval scholasticism to speak of God as the "Unmoved Mover" who is the First Cause of things that happen in the world.

In addition to the cause/effect principle of the Freudian approach to therapy, Freud viewed persons and the world atomistically. According to this view, people and the world are made up of smaller units that have an independent existence of their own apart from their relationship to the whole. The result of this approach was to split persons further from themselves and the world with little hope of any kind of integration.

In viewing all of life as process, we see a return beyond Plato's realm of essences and eternal truths to an earlier view expressed by the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus that everything is in flux.⁷ One never steps into the same river twice.⁸ Perls emphasizes that science has made the transition from linear causality to process thinking but that psychiatry has not.⁹

According to Perls this has resulted in psychiatry playing the "fitting game".¹⁰ Life is formed and shaped until it fits with a particular view of reality. This can be seen in the way language is used which treats people as objects or as things. A person may make a statement such as "I have a body" as opposed to "I am a body"; "I have a voice" rather than saying "I am speaking". This way of speaking gives structure to what should be process and fits an atomistic view of reality.

Drawing heavily on Eastern philosophy, Gestalt incorporates the concept of nothingness. In the Eastern language this means nothingness.¹¹ In the Western view of life as structure nothingness refers to an emptiness or a void. In Eastern as well as process thinking, nothingness or no-thingness is process, ever alive, ever moving.¹² Gestalt therapy seeks to bring a person back to life again through

⁷Perls, p. 46.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁰F. S. Perls, "Four Lectures", in Fagan and Shepherd, p. 15.

¹¹Ibid., p. 19.

¹²Ibid.

awareness by changing structure to process. By focusing on the here and now of experience one is enabled to deal with unfinished situations and the way is opened for active engagement with self and the world.

As a further way of moving from the cause/effect of Freud, Perls adopted a process mode of thinking which he labeled "differential thinking".¹³ Formerly it was thought that scientific observations were totally objective. Facts were observed and conclusions were drawn. Then it became apparent that even the so-called objective viewpoint of the scientist was colored by the scientist's own subjective needs and interests.

Through the work of S. Friedlander, Perls found a way to transcend the distortions contained in the cause/effect way of coming to knowledge. Perl states:

In his book Creative Indifference, Friedlaender brings forward the theory that every event is related to a zero-point from which the differentiation into opposites takes place. These opposites show in their specific context a great affinity to each other. By remaining alert in the centre, we can acquire a creative ability of seeing both sides of an occurrence and completing an incomplete half. By avoiding a one-sided outlook we gain a much deeper insight into the structure and function of the organism.¹⁴

Differential thinking enables one to remain in the zero point, the point of creative indifference. By remaining in the center, one is open to all the possibilities that are available in the field of interest so that figure formation can occur. In the process of organizing the field into figure and background a person can be aware of all the possibilities at his/her disposal.

¹³F. S. Perls, Ego, Hunger and Aggression (London: Allen & Unwin, 1947), p. 14.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 15.

THEORY OF GESTALT THERAPY

Gestalt Formation

Gestalt. A Gestalt is a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. This whole is made up of Gestalten of a lower order. For instance, a cell is a whole which combines with other cells to form an organ such as the heart or liver. Together these cells and organs combine to form a human being which is more than the cells and organs which come together in such a formation.

There is no equivalent word in English for the German word Gestalt. The closest English word is "configuration".

Figure and Ground. Gestalt psychology introduced the idea that in visual perception we collect visual fragments and assemble them into a gestalt or configuration.¹⁵ The objective world does not exist apart from our perception of it. To be sure there are phenomena out there as random objects in our field of vision. The process of seeing involves our actively organizing the field of vision according to our own needs and interests. Thus, our visual field is composed of "figure" and "background".¹⁶ Figure is what is most interesting and clear to us in our field of vision and background or ground is the context for that which is figure. There is a constant dynamic interplay going on between figure and ground. According to one's interests, that which is ground may shift and become figure and in the process that which was figure now

¹⁵F. S. Perls, et al., Gestalt Therapy (New York: Julian Press, 1951), p. 25.

¹⁶Ibid.

becomes ground. Gestalt formation and destruction is a constant process ever active and dynamic and is characteristic of the total functioning of the organism. As a person interacts with the field, paying attention to what is most interesting, he/she responds with the total range of sensory and motor responses. He/she feels, perceives and acts.

In summary, taking the zero point or point of creative indifference of the organism in its field, the field is undifferentiated. In the process of self-regulation the organism begins to differentiate the field according to its needs. I am writing this paper. My attention is focused on my work. Now I become aware that I am cold. I shift my attention. A polarity of heat and cold comes to my awareness. Cold could not exist without its opposite heat. I turn up the thermostat and the room begins to warm up. My need has been satisfied and the balance between organism and environment has been restored. I am now at the zero point again and can resume my work open to whatever possibilities or needs that may present themselves to my awareness.

Contact in Gestalt

Knowledge comes from awareness. It is a dynamic process of Gestalt formation and destruction. In order for this process to occur, there must be contact with the environment. Perls, et al. describe contact by saying,

the number and range of contact functions must be vast, for fundamentally an organism lives in its environment by maintaining its difference and, more importantly, by assimilating the environment to its difference; and it is at the boundary that dangers are rejected, obstacles are overcome, and the assimilable is selected and appropriated. Now what is selected and assimilated is always novel; the organism persists by assimilating the novel, by change and growth. For instance, food, as Aristotle used to say, is what is

"unlike" that can become "like"; and in the process of assimilation the organism is in turn changed. Primarily, contact is the awareness of, and behavior toward, the assimilable novelty; and the rejection of the unassimilable novelty. What is pervasive, always the same, or indifferent is not an object of contact.¹⁷

In order to enable growth to occur contact must be made. Without contact, growth is not possible. When healthy contact is made with one's environment, change will necessarily be the result. By assimilating what is novel and interesting and by rejecting that which is considered unassimilable novelty, change occurs.

Homeostasis. In the language of the laity, this is what Perls calls adaptation.¹⁸ It is the process by which the needs of the organism are satisfied. It is an ongoing process. Perls uses the analogy of the level of sugar in the blood. It must be maintained at the proper level. If it falls below the proper level the adrenal glands secrete adrenalin; this in turn causes the liver to turn its store of glycogen into sugar; this sugar then passes into the blood stream and the blood sugar level is restored. This occurs on a purely physiological level. There is no organismic awareness of what is happening. When the blood sugar level drops one also experiences hunger. Food is eaten, digested and a certain amount of it is turned into sugar. In this case, the organism is aware of being hungry and takes action to restore the imbalance.

When there is an excessive rise in the blood sugar level, the pancreas secretes insulin and the excess sugar is burned by the body.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 230.

¹⁸F. S. Perls, The Gestalt Approach and Eye Witness to Therapy (Palo Alto, CA: Science & Behavior Books, 1973), p. 5.

When the body cannot control the flow of insulin on the physiological level, the result is diabetes. This can be artificially controlled through the injection of insulin.

Since the organism exists not in isolation but in its environment, there must be contact and interchange for the organism to survive. This contact is necessary on both a psychological as well as a physiological level.

Contact Boundary. Normally a boundary defines a thing. According to Perls, Hefferline and Goodman,

When we say "boundary" we think of a boundary between; but the contact-boundary, where experience occurs, does not separate the organism and its environment, rather it limits the organism, contains and protects it, and at the same time it touches the environment...for example, the sensitive skin...is not so much a part of the "organism" as it is essentially the organ of a particular relation of the organism and the environment.¹⁹

The contact boundary forms as the self acts in the process of gestalt formation.²⁰ It is at the contact boundary that the ego functions as a process of distinguishing between the "I" and the "not-I". Perls refers to this as the ego boundary and says that the two phenomena of the ego boundary are identification and alienation.²¹ When this boundary becomes fixed and rigid the ego has lost the ability to distinguish between that which is "I" and that which is "not-I". A person who is neurotic may alienate parts of himself/herself outside his/her

¹⁹Perls, et al., p. 229.

²⁰Latner, p. 60.

²¹Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, p. 8.

contact boundary or that person may accept within his/her contact boundary parts that do not belong within his/her contact boundary.

Habitual identification and alienation of the ego function results in neurotic behavior. On the one hand, the organism may become stuck in confluent behavior which is the inability to distinguish between the "I" and the "not-I", resulting in sameness. In this position, the individual is afraid of contact for fear of becoming alienated. On the other hand, the individual may move the other side of the polarity and become stuck in alienating behavior. Here the individual is afraid of contact for fear that he/she will be engulfed.

In Gestalt Therapy contact is neither good nor bad.²² Unhealthy contact or continual contact results in people described by Perls as the hangers-on.²³ The opposite of contact is withdrawal. Like contact, in and of itself, withdrawal is simply one means of coping with the environment. It only becomes pathological when it is the only response of the individual to the environment. A person who is neurotic is unable to make good contact nor is he/she able to organize his/her withdrawal.²⁴ Using the example of a prizefighter, Perls says contact is made with the opponent's jaw but does not remain there. He withdraws and prepares for the next blow. Contact and withdrawal, in a rhythmic pattern, are the means whereby the organism satisfies its needs.²⁵

²²Perls, Gestalt Approach, p. 21

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., p. 23.

Resistances in Gestalt Therapy

The process nature of Gestalt therapy is clearer as one begins to move from neurotic to healthy behavior. Perls characterizes the neurotic person as one on whom society impinges upon too heavily.²⁶ In neurosis, an individual has no clear sense of his/her boundary as opposed to persons in the environment. Perls noted that a neurotic is like Eliot's phrase, "nothing but a set of obsolete responses".²⁷ He/she cannot properly distinguish between himself/herself and the environment and tends to view society as larger than life and himself/herself as smaller.²⁸

We must be careful not to treat neurosis as a structural disorder. It is simply the process of how an individual continually interrupts his/her growth or maturation. Perls defines maturation as moving from environmental support to self-support.²⁹ He stated that growth disorder would be a better term than neurosis.³⁰

Neurosis manifests itself anytime an individual refuses to use his/her resources and resorts to manipulating others or the environment for support. An individual learns to play helpless by not listening; not hearing or not seeing. In order for one to move from environmental to self-support, a person must become aware of how he/she turns off and plays helpless.

²⁶Perls, "Four Lectures", p. 31.

²⁷Latner, p. 97.

²⁸Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, p. 27.

²⁹Ibid., p. 30.

³⁰Ibid.

Layers of Neurosis

Perls talks about the five layers of neurosis. It is unfortunate that in doing this he tends to make structure out of process. In a question and answer session he acknowledged this problem and said that it was only an approximation of what the process was like.³¹

The five layers of neurosis he describes are the phony layer, the phobic layer, the impasse, the implosive and the explosive layer. It would be more accurate to describe the process of moving from neurotic behavior to wholeness as including the working through of whatever defenses a person has adopted. At some point in the therapeutic process a person may find himself/herself experiencing any or all of them not necessarily in the above order.

Perls also referred to the phony layer as the cliché layer. It is the layer of socially conditioned behavior and responses. He coined the phrase "topdog/underdog"³² as a way of describing how a person plays the mental game of improving himself/herself. The topdog is the internal bully who continuously threatens the underdog with "shoulds" and "oughts". The underdog appears to be powerless but in reality controls the power by constantly rationalizing its sabotaging behavior.

The phobic layer comes into existence as a person becomes aware of the artificial roles and games he/she uses to maintain his/her existence. Here a person gets in touch with the fears that maintain their

³¹Perls, "Four Lectures", p. 24.

³²Ibid., p. 4.

artificial existence and will spend much time avoiding dealing with these fears lest some catastrophe befall them were they to behave in a genuine way.

The third and crucial area of the move from neurosis to wholeness is the impasse. The Russians refer to this as the "sick point".³³ It occurs when a person has not discovered his/her own self-support and environmental support is not forthcoming.³⁴ The task of the therapist is to keep the person in the impasse until there is a breakthrough. It is here that a person experiences the threat of death. If growth or change is to occur, a person must go through the impasse. Perls gave this account in a workshop:

...when a person runs right head-on into the impasse his rational self is jammed. In the unconscious opposites exist rather comfortably; in the conscious they jam the computer. Gestalt therapy in one sense is just getting people into their impasse solidly, then encouraging them to stay there until the impasse vanishes as if by a miracle. I asked Fritz Perls to explain impasse resolution. He replied, "I don't know what happens, unless you call it God's mercy!". That was the only time I ever heard Fritz speak of God with any acknowledgement or reverence.³⁵

As a result of being in the impasse a person moves to the implosive area. Here he/she learns further perhaps in moments of despair, how he/she has been limiting his/her growth by constrictive behavior. Out of this implosive area one experiences the explosive area. Here a person explodes or breaks out into new forms of life.

³³Ibid., p. 18.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Jack Downing and Robert Marmorstein, Dreams and Nightmares (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 88.

Perls characterizes these new forms of life as: explosion into joy, into grief, into orgasm, or into anger.³⁶

The maturation of the person is the primary goal in therapy. The immature person remains stuck in the phony roles and behavior that he/she has learned as a way of manipulating others or the environment to provide support. Early on in a child's development, when frustration occurs, the choice is either to avoid the frustration by manipulating mother or father or seek to deal with it in terms of his/her own resources. This whole scenario is further complicated by the fact that parents, the entire family unit, often work to keep a child dependent on them. The covert message is, "Don't you worry. You don't have to stand on your own two feet. We'll take care of you".

As a result of this situation, a child learns very quickly the various manipulative techniques, i.e., phony roles, playing stupid, playing helpless, playing weak, flattery and any number of other manipulative techniques that work.³⁷ Over the years, living out of these artificial patterns of behavior, he/she loses all sense of who he/she is. The result for a person is similar to a jigsaw puzzle in which there are missing parts. The total picture is incomplete. There are holes or gaps in the personality. Perls described some persons as so much into their head, always computing and thinking, that they have no heart.³⁸ Others have no legs to stand on symbolizing a total lack of

³⁶Perls, "Four Lectures", p. 22.

³⁷Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, p. 39.

³⁸Ibid.

support, while others have no eyes.³⁹ They project their eyes onto others or the world and thus feel that the eyes of others are always on them.⁴⁰ This is descriptive of the person who is so self-conscious that he/she has no sense of spontaneity. Everything he/she does is always done as if others were watching and judging him/her with critical eyes. Still others lose their ears and are constantly talking hoping to find someone who will listen. Therefore, as a result of this, most conversations are not dialogues but monologues, those who don't listen talking with others who also don't listen.

The Role of the Therapist

From this description of neurotic or immature behavior the role of the therapist becomes clear. In Gestalt therapy, a therapist is not just a passive listener in the Rogerian style. A therapist is not a helper. To attempt to help another is to be doomed from the start.⁴¹ A therapist is more of a catalyst or gadfly. The role of a midwife is very accurate in describing the work of a therapist. By being attentive and alert, acting as a sounding board in order that the person can discover his/her missing parts that have been alienated and given to the world and others, the therapist provides the situation in which the person can grow if he/she chooses to grow.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

It is important to emphasize that in this process, growth in and of itself, is not the ultimate aim. There are other growth therapies that do not share the same ontological structure as Gestalt therapy. Many organisms grow. Cancer cells grow. Mushrooms grow. Recalling Perl's statement that to die and be reborn is not easy, we see the emphasis shifting from a growth oriented therapy to a therapy that is more existential and depth oriented. The therapist must not be afraid to allow a person to experience his/her impasse with its threat of death and nothingness knowing that out of this impasse he/she will come to aliveness and authenticity.

The goal of the therapist is to lead a person into the impasse by constantly refusing to become a helper or rescuer. The person experiences the impasse as that area of deadness and nothingness and will attempt to manipulate the therapist in order to avoid entering the impasse. Perls writes,

So we are always trying to get to the impasse, and find the point where you believe you have no chance of survival because you don't find the means in yourself. When we find the place where the person is stuck, we come to the surprising discovery that this impasse is mostly merely a matter of fantasy. It doesn't exist in reality. A person only believes he has not his resources at his disposal. He only prevents himself from using his resources by conjuring up a lot of catastrophic expectations. He expects something bad in the future. "People won't like me." "I might do something foolish." "If I would do this, I wouldn't be loved anymore, I would die", and so on. We have all these catastrophic fantasies by which we prevent ourselves from living, being. We are continually projecting threatening fantasies onto the world, and these fantasies prevent us from taking the reasonable risks which are part and parcel of growing and living.⁴²

⁴²Ibid., p. 42.

Perls is not optimistic about a person's intentions when coming into therapy. He says that most people go into therapy not to be cured but only to improve their neurosis.⁴³

In the impasse a person has the experience of waking up. It's the "aha" of awareness that this is how I prevent myself from functioning. In one of his lectures⁴⁴ Perls points out that one way of learning comes by getting information and then feeding it into our computer in order to play the fitting game. Does it fit with the way I have structured reality in my fantasy world? The other way of learning is by uncovering or discovering what is already there. Through awareness of how he/she avoids contact with others and the world by living out of the middle zone of awareness or fantasy, a person discovers a new way of existing and being in the world, a new way of being with regard to others, a new sense of self-worth and acceptance. In the language of faith one is reborn to a new self, a self that knows through healthy contact with the world and others, by always dealing with the here and now, one can have the assurance that all he/she needs is already in his/her possession.

As a person continues the process of discovering the recovering the fragmented parts of himself/herself, he/she becomes centered. To discover one's center is to be thoroughly grounded in one's self, with the awareness that I am doing this as opposed to someone else. A person can then have the freedom to develop less rigid ego boundaries. Being

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Perls, "Four Lectures", p. 18.

grounded in one's self is to have the freedom to encounter the world and others without losing one's own identity.

Forms of Resistance

Having discussed the structure of neurosis and the process of moving from phony behavior through the impasse into the explosion of our previously impacted energies into a more authentic, spontaneous self, we now probe further into the neurotic mode of existence by looking at four ways a person can channel his/her energies as he/she chooses to make good contact with others and the environment or resist such contact.

As pointed out earlier, when discussing the contact function, it is impossible to be in constant contact with the environment or with others. There is a rhythm to our lives that allows us to make contact and then withdraw. The neurotic as we have seen has no sense of his/her self. He/she rejects parts of himself/herself that belong within the boundary of self and accepts as part of himself/herself objects that are not part of the self-boundary.

Introjection. The ability of the organism to grow is based on a healthy balance of assimilation and elimination. We take in food, chew it up, digest it and assimilate it to the needs of our body. As a result, the cells of our body receive the energy they need for growth. Growth can only take place if in the process we digest and assimilate thoroughly what we take from the environment. When we don't assimilate, but swallow whole, accepting indiscriminately from the environment,

we have a parasite within us. It has not become part of us but still is a part of the environment. On the physical level, food that is not chewed and digested makes us uncomfortable and we must either throw it up or take something in order that we might digest it, however painful it may be.

On the psychological level, we take in the values and mores of parents and family. As in the physical process of assimilation, we take in whatever we need psychologically. But if we do not digest and assimilate, then these remain within our self-boundary as foreign objects. We begin to behave as if we were the introject. Within our ego-boundary these introjects become shoulds and oughts. We never develop our own personality because we are so busy with the introjects. This can lead to personality disintegration due to the fact that two incompatible introjects have been swallowed. In the process of trying to reconcile them we become torn apart.

In therapy, the therapist seeks to help the person identify with the introjects so that he/she can decide which to keep and which to discard. In this process, the "I should" becomes "I want".

The healthy aspect of introjection enables a person to take in outside information such as is necessary in learning a skill. It could possibly be argued that once the skill has been learned, the information necessary for learning it has ceased being an introject and has become a part of the self.

Projection. In projection, an individual appears to make contact with others and the environment, but in reality is only in contact

with himself/herself. It is a case of mistaken identity. Just as in introjection he/she sees the introjects as part of himself/herself, now the person is further confused. Having accepted the introjects as part of himself/herself, he/she is forced to disown the other parts now seen as alien. The person is under the delusion that it is the introjects that are being rejected when in fact what is being rejected is aspects of himself/herself.

Paranoia, which in extreme cases is characterized by delusions, is a form of extreme projection. Having introjected the idea that aggressive feelings are wrong, the person must now project these aggressive feelings onto others or the environment. Now he/she accuses others of doing to him/her what he/she would like to do to them.

All of us make assumptions about others and the environment from our observations. When we cease to recognize these assumptions as assumptions and take them for the truth about others and the environment, we are projecting. The neurotic uses the mechanism of projection to enforce his/her "victim of circumstances" mentality. He/she has no responsibility for whatever is happening to him/her.

In healthy forms of projection, a person plans and anticipates, makes assumptions with the knowledge that this is what is happening and also with the knowledge that he/she is not locked in but has choices and options available.

In therapy, the therapist attempts to enable the person to own the projection. What "they" are doing becomes what "I" would like to do. John Enright⁴⁵ makes use of a valuable technique in groups which

⁴⁵John B. Enright, "Thou Art That: Projection and Play", in J. O. Stevens (ed.) Gestalt Is (Moab, UT: Real People Press, 1975), p. 149ff.

can help people in dealing with their projections. His assumption is that everyone engages in projection. He will have persons in a group look around the room and pick an object with which they identify. Everyone is then asked to spend a couple of minutes identifying with the object, making "I" statements about it. Perhaps a person might choose a lamp in the room. He/she might then make statements such as "I am attractive"; "I am useful"; "I give light so that others might see". In doing this he/she might also become aware of something painful such as a lady did who identified with a beam in the ceiling using the comment, "I have a heavy load to bear".

By using this method, anyone can become more aware of how he/she gives his/her power to others and the environment.

Confluence. In confluence, the individual experiences no sense of differentiation. Figure and ground never clearly form. He/she feels at one with the environment. Newborn infants live in confluence.⁴⁶ In confluence, a person has no experience of self as opposed to others. Everything is the same. There is a feeling of oneness.

When a person is chronically stuck in confluent behavior, he/she is sick. He/she is not able to accept and appropriate difference. This can be seen in parents who see their children only as extensions of themselves. They are unaware of where they stop and where others begin.⁴⁷ As a result, the person caught in habitual confluence cannot withdraw because he/she has no experience of self to which he/she can withdraw.

⁴⁶Perls, Gestalt Approach, p. 38.

⁴⁷Ibid.

The result is one of total confusion. A key to identify a person caught in confluent behavior is the constant use of "we" instead of "I". Some couples get caught in confluent marriages feeling that they must never establish their own identity.

The other side of confluence is alienation. In this case a person is stuck in alienating behavior, fearful of making contact lest he/she become engulfed.

In healthy confluence, a person is able to empathize with another.

In therapy, the therapist seeks to foster good contact between the individual and others. He/she must discover the ability to differentiate and make choices which do not always have to coincide with the choices of others.

Retroflection. In retroflection, the person manipulates and controls himself/herself. Literally, the word means "turning back sharply against".⁴⁸ A person does to himself/herself what he/she would like to do to others. A person who commits suicide is turning destructive feelings toward others onto himself/herself.

The clue to retroflective behavior can be seen in the language a person uses. "Myself" appears frequently. "I am angry with myself." "I have to control myself." In this use of language, it is easy to see how a split occurs within the ego boundary. He/she becomes the doer and the done to.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 40.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 41.

Retroflective behavior is healthy when self-control and caution are necessary. Every impulse that a person has cannot be allowed free expression. However, we do not need to turn our destructive impulses back onto ourselves.

Another pole of retroflective behavior can be seen in the person who constantly indulges himself/herself. This bears out Perls' observation that in neurotic behavior, a person may experience his or her self as a beast or an angel but never with the sense of "myself".⁵⁰

In therapy, the therapist as usual seeks to foster healthy contact. All false identifications of the self must become integrated. Once the person is able to distinguish between the "I" and the "not-I" then the splits in the personality can come into awareness and become integrated.

In summarizing these forms of resistances it can be said:

Introjection—the person does what others expect of him/her.

Projection—the person does to others what he/she accuses others of doing to him/her.

Confluence—the person doesn't know who is doing what or to whom.

Retroflection—the person does to himself/herself what he/she would like to do to others.

⁵⁰Ibid.

TWO GESTALT THERAPY SESSIONS

The following two therapy sessions are taken from an on-going Gestalt Therapy group. They are used to illustrate the epistemological framework of Gestalt Therapy.

Session #1

Pat is a woman who has been taking chemo-therapy treatments for cancer. She has been taking the treatments for around eight months. Her doctor originally prescribed a period of treatments to last around a year and a half. Physically, she has responded to the treatments rather well. She has suffered the normal side effects such as loss of hair and some nausea. Her biggest problem has been the long periods of depression that have continued with only short periods of relief. In previous sessions she has discovered the top-dog/underdog dialogue that she gets into. She begins:

P: There's a part of me that says I'm so tired of these treatments. I don't know if I can take anymore. I just feel like it's not going to work out. I'm afraid that I'm not ever going to be well.

T: What does the other part say?

P: (switches chairs) pauses reflectively...You've got to pull yourself together. You can do it if you want to. But you don't seem to want to try. You give up too easy. You won't ever be well either if you don't stop being so negative.

T: Let the other side respond.

P: (switches chairs...long pause)

T: You might begin by saying, "what I heard you say was..."

P: What I heard you say is that I have to try harder...that I won't ever be well unless I stop being so negative.

- T: And how do you answer?
- P: I don't know how. I am so tired. I didn't go to my treatment this week. I just called them and told them I wasn't going to take anymore.
- T: Did you inform your Doctor of your decision?
- P: I had previously talked with him about it. He said that he would leave it up to me...that I may have had enough of the chemo-therapy.
- T: How much more were you scheduled to take?
- P: I've had about half of the treatments. I'm doing okay physically, it's just that I can't deal with the feelings that I'm not going to get well. (Her voice is a low monotone with very little feeling.)
- T: Switch chairs. Now respond to what Pat said.
- P: You just refuse to try. You just sit and feel sorry for yourself.
- T: You sound as if you might be angry with her.
- P: Yes, I am angry. (Still not much feeling.)
- T: (To group) Notice the way she is sitting...slumped in the chair with her legs crossed out in front...a very passive position. (To Pat) I would suggest that you sit up straight in the chair with both feet squarely on the floor. Feel the support of the floor under your feet. Feel the support from the back of the chair against your back. Now respond to Pat by using the statement: "I resent the fact that you..."
- P: I resent the fact that you just sit and feel sorry for yourself.
I resent the fact that you quit the treatments.
I resent the fact that you are so negative.
I resent the fact that you make us both sick.
(Feelings are much more congruent with her words now.)
- T: How do you feel now?
- P: I feel like I want to hit her.
- T: Go ahead and hit her. (The chair is cushioned.)
- P: (Begins to beat the cushion vigorously.)
I am so sick of your whining and feeling sorry for yourself.

- P: ...after a few moments of pounding on the cushion...pause...
Boy, that sure feels a lot better. I feel much better.
- T: Now that you've had a chance to express your anger and resentment toward her, could you tell her what you would like for her to do?
- P: I'd like for you to stop complaining. You are going to be all right. I would like for you to believe that.
- T: How do you feel about her stopping the treatments now?
- P: (Pauses for a moment)...It's all right. I can accept that.
- T: Switch chairs and respond.
- P: (Pause as if to center in)...It feels much better here now. I feel more positive. (Smiles broadly) I really feel that I'm going to be okay. I believe I'm going to be all right.
- T: Respond to what you heard her say that she'd like from you.
- P: I hear you say you'd like me to stop complaining and be more positive.
- T: And how do you respond?
- P: She's right. I do complain a lot. But I feel more support from her now. I feel I can be more positive.
- T: What would you like from her?
- P: I need you to give me support and encouragement and not be so judgmental.
- T: Switch chairs and respond.
- P: I hear you say you want me to support and encourage you and not be so judgmental. I feel better toward you now. I can be more help to you.
- T: How do you feel now?
- P: Good.
- T: Switch chairs. How do you feel now?
- P: I feel like we're more together. I feel much better. I feel really good. I'm not sure whether I'll continue the treatments.

P: I feel that if I need to, I can go back to the treatments. Right now I'm not sure what I'll do. I need to consult with my doctor again.

In this session, we see Pat struggling in a top-dog/underdog position. At the beginning of the session, she is much in her head with little feeling. She is in somewhat of an impasse. Her normal way of coping with the conflict is to try harder. No matter how hard she tries she always ends up sabotaging her efforts. She can then be more judgmental toward herself and her underdog self can feel more depressed and helpless.

She begins to come alive when she gets in touch with her resentments and anger. The key to her getting in touch was her body position. By calling attention to the incongruence between her words and the way she was sitting she was able to actualize her resentment and anger. By expressing this anger, she is able to break through into a new self-awareness and a new way of existing.

By identifying and experiencing both polarities, a new self emerges that is more affirmative and positive about her situation. The therapist may have been able to point all of this out to her, but until she experienced both polarities of her self she could not move on to integrate the awareness.

Often a person who is experiencing depression will get in touch with feelings of anger and resentment. The word depress carries the image of holding something down. The energy that it takes to keep the feelings from awareness is not available for making genuine contact with herself/himself or with others. When she made contact with her feelings of anger and resentment, then her energies become free for making healthy

contact with the actuality of her situation and not her fantasies. She has affirmed her decision to discontinue the treatments along with the approval of her Doctor. She is also reading more about her type of cancer and exploring other methods of treatment that focus on wholistic models. In the last group session, she shared this with the group along with admitting that she still has some apprehension about the future.

This session was chosen because there was a definite breakthrough for her. There have been other times when this kind of breakthrough did not occur. She continues to be a part of the group and to deal with whatever she chooses.

Session #2

This next session is also from a Gestalt Therapy group. Mary has been part of an ongoing group for some time.

T: Okay, who's ready to work?

M: I have something I want to work on. I was doing great until a few weeks ago. Then these damn dizzy spells started recurring. About ninety percent of the time I function well and then I don't do so well the other ten percent. Since I discovered that part of me that is so helpless, I don't like her. (In an arrogant manner with her head turned up and to the side.) I'd like to be rid of her and be a whole person.

T: What do you mean by a whole person?

M: I mean when I feel good and alive and turned on to life. I function well and get things done. But then I become aware of her and she's like a burden to me.

T: How do you experience this burden in your body?

M: It's like a heavy feeling on my chest.

- T: Take a moment and imagine you are going inside your chest into the heavy feeling. See if you get an image of the heaviness.
- M: (Closes her eyes and becomes still. After a few moments) I experience a conflict. There's this tree...but it's dead...and I'm holding onto it. If I let go I become just a falling leaf, just floating.
- T: Can you become the falling leaf?
- M: I don't want to. I want to hold onto the tree.
- T: Speak to the tree.
- M: I'm holding onto you but you are dead. I know that I have to let go if I'm to be a whole person. I just don't want to have to deal with her.
- T: (To Mary and the group) Here we have an instance of Mary living out of an ideal or fantasy of what wholeness means which doesn't include dealing with the other part. (To Mary)...I suggest to you that wholeness comes from being where you are and experiencing whatever is available to you. You might begin by speaking to the other Mary.
- M: (Shakes her head in agreement) All right...I see you over there and I'd like for you to be a part of me and enjoy life.
- T: Switch chairs and be the other Mary.
- M: (Assumes a foetal position) It feels good to just be over here and hold myself.
- T: Would you respond to what Mary said to you over there?
- M: (Raises up and in a slightly haughty attitude) I don't even see her over there. As far as I am concerned she is not even over there.
- T: You must be pretty angry with her not to even notice that she exists.
- M: (Moving out of the foetal position)...You're damn right I'm angry with her. You think you are such tough shit. You are so turned on and aware. You know so much. Well, you are nothing. You act so high and mighty. I get so embarrassed with your constant talking about how you are so aware and know so much.
- T: Switch chairs. Now respond to Mary.

- M: (A bit surprised and in a reflective tone) Boy you sure are angry with me. I didn't expect that. I hear you saying I think I know so much. (Pauses as if letting it all sink in) Maybe you are right. I do like to know and to be aware. I just wish you could be with me. I need your help.
- T: Tell her what you need from her.
- M: I need you to be with me and let me know when I ignore you. (Pause)
- T: Switch chairs.
- M: (Assumes foetal position again)...I don't believe you. You don't really need me. (Hugs herself tightly) I could just stay here forever. This feels so good. (Holds herself more tightly, then looks over to the therapist.)
- T: You have a choice. What do you want to do?
- M: I don't know. I just feel that I could be in my own world. I'm the one who gets dizzy and spaced out. (Pause...then looks again to the therapist.)
- T: Do you want something from me?
- M: I'm not sure. I know that I have to be here. (After a moment moves from the foetal position to a more active position)...I feel like a baby with its thumb in its mouth...(puts thumb in her mouth...then after a moment...) She treats me like a baby, like I am so helpless.
- T: Switch chairs.
- M: I feel that damn heavy feeling on my chest again, as if I'm weighted down.
- T: What's the feeling...Get in touch with the feelings.
- M: (Becomes quiet and appears to be on the verge of tears then looks around in surprise)...I'll be darned. I guess you are right. I do treat you like a baby. I can deal with you that way. I can protect you.
- T: Do you see that you have a need to keep her that way?
- M: (Nodding her head in agreement) Yeah...if you were to become an adult you'd be crazy. (Laughs)
- T: So you keep her as a helpless, dependent child.

- M: (Nodding more vigorously) Yes, that's exactly what I do to her.
- T: Would she in fact be crazy if she were to become an adult?
- M: No, not really...No, she wouldn't be crazy.
- T: Switch chairs. How do you respond to her?
- M: (Sits up in the chair and stretches) I don't have to be a baby and be helpless. (Pauses)...I still have that tingling, dizzy feeling in my head.
- T: She said that she was afraid if she allowed you to become an adult that you'd be crazy.
- M: No, I'm not crazy and I'm not helpless.
- T: Characterize yourself with the words "I am..." and then finish the sentence.
- M: I am alive (begins to move her body in a stretching manner). I am growing (continues to stretch and explore her body movements). I am being born (smiles broadly and nods agreement)...Yeah that's who I am...I am being born. I am very young and have much to learn...and that's okay...I don't know much but I will learn.
- T: Now switch chairs.
- M: I feel good over here. The heaviness is gone. (Looks toward the other chair) I don't see you as a helpless child. You are a person. I don't know everything over here either but I'm open to learning.
- T: What have you learned?
- M: That I can't ignore that part of me. I get going and feel so proud of myself and then it seems that she always pops up.
- T: It is my experience that when I feel proud of myself that I have developed a split. I can overcome that tendency to acknowledge the split by focusing on awareness. As opposed to saying, "I am proud of myself for whatever reason", which encourages the split into "self" and "other", I can focus on awareness. I can say, "I'm aware that I am experiencing a sense of accomplishment now", or "I'm aware that I'm feeling good right now".
- M: Yeah, I can really identify with that. I do that quite a lot. I can see how awareness acknowledges my feelings without encouraging a split.

Here we see some of the advantages of group therapy. In addition to receiving the support of the group, each person chooses when they want to work. No one is forced to do anything they are not willing to do.

Mary begins by discovering that she can only deal with where she is and what she is experiencing at any given moment. Change occurs through awareness. In this case, it is the awareness that she has a choice to remain helpless or to actualize her own power. By dealing with the here and now of awareness, she discovers that her fears are fantasy and not reality. She has been afraid that if she were to stop being helpless she would be crazy. She discovers that this in fact is not true. She doesn't have to remain helpless and she will not be crazy if she begins to actualize her own power. She discovers how she has chosen to be dizzy. Her previously blocked energies are now free for more authentic behavior and for making contact with reality as opposed to her fantasies.

Her tendency to split into self and other by being proud of herself indicates retroflection, turning against herself. She could be angry with herself or proud of herself. In either case, her notion of wholeness did not include the full participation of her other self. She could be acknowledged as long as she was a baby or played helpless. By focusing on her awareness she gets more of a feeling of being totally into whatever she is experiencing. A split that has been structure now becomes process. When she is experiencing the process she discovers that she has alternatives and can choose.

The role of the therapist in both instances is seen as a catalyst. He notices, pays attention and directs the person to deal with what seems to be obvious at the moment. At several points, the therapist may have chosen to follow other leads but did not. There is no right way for doing therapy except to be attentive to the here and now and enable the person to actualize themselves in such a way that they can either choose to change their behavior or accept it.

Both of the sessions above were taken from Gestalt Therapy group sessions and were used with the permission of the persons involved. In both instances, the names were changed.

Summary

In this chapter, knowledge in Gestalt Therapy does not mean the accumulation of facts or information. One does not reason one's way to insight or truth. Knowledge is a process of discovering or uncovering that healthy contact with self, others and the world is necessary for growth. In the process a person moves from phony behavior through the impasse into authentic existence. Thus, one is always in process of becoming and the new mode of existence as self-in-the-world is in fact a new way of being in the world.

CHAPTER III

EPISTEMOLOGY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF
THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS PROCLAIMED BY JESUS

In this century we have seen the fruition of a process begin in the nineteenth century with Kierkegaard wherein theology has found another way of viewing reality by moving from the substance categories of Greek philosophy to process and existential categories of what might be called Hebraic existence. As a result of this development, the impetus has been toward the search for a genuine biblical theology growing out of scripture rather than being imposed on scripture from other philosophies. Having been nurtured in Palestinian Judaism, the early Christians found themselves moving into a world dominated by Greek thought and as a result found themselves turning to philosophical categories and modes of thought in the world for the expression of faith and for the explication of the meaning of Christian existence.

This chapter will include a review of theological trends as they developed out of Greek categories of thought and then proceed into outlining the origins of the Kingdom of God debate as begun by Schleiermacher and amplified by Johannes Weiss. Then the discussion will focus on the Kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus. The work of Norman Perrin in this area will be the primary resource. The implication is that in the proclamation of the Kingdom of God by Jesus we encounter knowledge of God as God's self-disclosure.

EPISTEMOLOGY IN CONTEXT:
A REVIEW OF THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Greek vs. Hebrew Thought: An Overview

In Greek categories that which is real is that which is constant and unchanging. In an attempt to avoid the contingencies of life in a world of change, Plato gave to his time the "eternal realm of essences".¹ That which is "really real" in the universe is the universals or Ideas. Particular things in the world are real to the extent that they participate in the eternal. With few exceptions, this view of the world dominated Christian thought until the time of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard insisted that the individual, existing thing is more real than the universal. As a result, he is considered to be the father of modern Existentialism.

In contrast, Hebraic thought contains no eternal realm of essences. Hebraic man is a concrete, existing individual. Man does not have intellectual access to God through reason but lives before God a life of faith in the world. Commitment rather than detachment is characteristic of the Hebraic mode of existence. For the Hebrew, the real is an activity or process. Instead of being static, reality is dynamic. That which is really real is God's faithfulness which is new every morning. This conception of reality can be seen in the difference between the verb "to be" in Greek and Hebrew. In Greek the verb "to be" expresses that which is while in Hebrew where there is no conception of

¹William Barrett, Irrational Man (New York: Doubleday, 1958), p. 76.

past, present and future as a linear time line, the verb indicates a process that is going on. God's judgment and righteousness are not attributes of God as a self-contained reality but express the way God makes things right and just.

In Greek categories the world, insofar as it participates in the ideal, is beautiful. Insofar as it participates in change and death, it is to be avoided by seeking the realm of eternal truths.² For the Hebrew way of thinking, the world is the creation of God and God has declared it as good.

For the Greeks, man is a combination of the rational and animal.³ Reason as the divine within man is of a different substance than man's animal or irrational nature.⁴ There is a continuity between man and God often seen as the "spark of the divine" within man. In contrast, Hebraic man is a creature who enjoys no such continuity with God. He is created out of nothing, and stands before God as one who is responsible. He is the one who is addressed by God and who responds in obedience.

Faith vs. Reason

We can see here the beginnings of a conflict which manifested itself in Christianity as faith against reason. Though strongly colored by Greek and neo-Platonic thought, Christianity belongs on the side of Hebraic thought since faith is above reason.⁵ The Apostle Paul

²Ibid., p. 83.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 92.

writes: "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom".⁶ And wisdom is no less than rational philosophy and not religious faith.⁷

St. Augustine saw faith and reason as working together and this became the pattern of Christian thought for centuries later with few exceptions. After Augustine, the formula became "faith seeking understanding".⁸ Proofs for the existence of God were developed using cause and effect reasoning. When Aristotle was rediscovered as a result of the Moslem invasions in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a way was introduced for viewing reality apart from Christ and the Church. St. Thomas in a sense baptized Aristotle into the Christian faith. Commenting on a passage in Aristotle's Ethics which states that reason is our true and real self, St. Thomas the Christian doesn't challenge it, but merely expounds it in straightforward agreement.⁹

But the damage had been done. The fatal blow to the monolithic structure of theology within the church had been struck. Neither Lutheran orthodoxy nor Roman Catholicism was able to provide an answer to the prominent place of reason as expressed in the philosophy of the Age of Enlightenment. With this humanistic Renaissance emphasis on man,

⁶I Corinthians 1:21-22 (RSV).

⁷Barrett, p. 92.

⁸Ibid., p. 97.

⁹Ibid., p. 100.

a new certainty was sought that was grounded in man's reason. Rene Descartes expressed this new-found certainty in his famous formula cogito ergo sum, "I think, therefore I am". God who had been experienced as Subject within the understanding of faith now becomes Object who is explored and understood through the use of reason.

Immanuel Kant revealed his Lutheran background when he refuted rationalistic epistemology in his Critique of Pure Reason. In doing this, Kant made possible a reconstruction of the subject matter and method of theology that could have cleared the way for a recovery of Luther's understanding of the nature of faith as trust in Christ's justification. He thus dealt a death blow to the rationalistic speculations of seventeenth century orthodoxy and its Aristotelian philosophical framework by showing that basic religious and metaphysical concepts like God, freedom and immortality cannot be reached by pure reason.

However, instead of awakening faith as trust as taught by Luther, faith degenerated into morality. Against Kant and the German idealists, (i.e. Fichte & Hegel), the Romanticists in Germany aimed to place feeling into a place of prominence. Schleiermacher turned to his pietistic background and asserted the essentiality of faith as a certain feeling of absolute dependence. Theology in this context became anthropology. He assumed that man had the ability to recognize this God-consciousness in Jesus and model his life after it. There is an Anknüpfungspunkt, a point of contact between God and man within man.

In Kierkegaard the foundation was laid for a return to the orthodox doctrine of revelation. He asserted that truth is found only

in revelation established between God and man from God's side. He maintained that there is a qualitative difference between God and man. In summary, the medieval view held that God was the Subject and man the object of his grace through the Church. In Descartes view God became the Object and man the subject, God being a projection of man's ideas, and finally in Kierkegaard, we have God as the Subject and man as the subject, subordinate to God.

Karl Barth, disillusioned with all previous attempts of theology in that they operated with philosophical presuppositions, was driven back to the Bible. His Römerbrief appeared in 1918 exploding the ivory towers in which theologians were ensconced. Barth called into question all attempts to harmonize and identify Christian faith with any particular Weltanschauung. Something of its revolutionary character can be seen when Barth says:

The religion which we are able to detect in ourselves and in others is that of human possibility.....if religion be understood as a concrete, comprehensible, and historical phenomenon in the world of men and of sin and of death.....it must be abandoned.¹⁰

All of these attempts end up in the territory of the "No-God" of this world. Man cannot discover God. God must come to man. Barth's starting point for doing theology is God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ. All previous attempts of philosophy and theology to fashion their subject met with failure. Theology does not create its subject, rather its subject is presented to it. Barth's emphasis is God as He has revealed Himself to the world in Jesus Christ according to the witness of scripture.

¹⁰Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 184.

Having given a brief historical survey of theological trends as they emanated out of Greek categories of thought and neo-Platonism from the beginnings of Christianity to the present century, we now consider the Kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus in order to arrive at a genuine biblical theology.

ORIGINS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD DEBATE

The Kingdom of God discussion has been given significance and prominence by the work of Norman Perrin.¹¹ Perrin gives an account of the beginnings of the discussion with Schleiermacher and traces it through Albrecht Ritschl, Johannes Weiss and on to the present state of the discussion.

Friederich Schleiermacher

With his focus on the kingdom of God, Schleiermacher gave it a central place in his theology, thus bringing it into the forefront for modern theological debate.¹² However, he adapted it to his own understanding and theology rather than to the teaching of Jesus. In Schleiermacher's theology, persons are drawn together on the basis of a common feeling and this creates the church. This social contract view of the church carries over into his understanding of the kingdom of God. It is the corporate life of Christians in fellowship with God made

¹¹Norman Perrin, The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963).

¹²Perrin, p. 13.

possible and indeed founded by Christ within which men become truly conscious of God.¹³ The God-consciousness in Christ calls forth the God-consciousness that is already present in man. The redemptive work of Christ consists in Jesus mediating to us the ability to live every moment in absolute dependence.

This kingdom of God is the sole object of the divine world government, and individual believers are the objects of the divine care in that the divine care is bent on furthering their activity in the kingdom, i.e. their manifestation of God in the world through their corporate God-consciousness.¹⁴

Albrecht Ritschl

Ritschl focused on the work of Schleiermacher concerning the kingdom of God. He criticized Schleiermacher's understanding of the kingdom of God at two points. First, he neglected to emphasize the teleological nature of the kingdom of God as the divine end and secondly, he failed to relate this to the function of Jesus as the mediator of the kingdom of God.¹⁵

Ritschl proposed to remedy this by stressing two focal points, the christological and the teleological. Redemption consists in the freedom of the individual from guilt and over the world.¹⁶ Faith in the divinity of Christ is a value judgment we make when Christ has this value for us. When we are aware that in Jesus Christ God is forgiving

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁶Ibid.

us then Christ is the Messiah for us. This freedom which God grants in Jesus Christ marks the personal end of the individual Christian.¹⁷

When we are reconciled to God and share in this new freedom, we have a kind of Kantian "categorical imperative", a sense of ought to transform society. Not only must the individual be concerned with being good but also must be concerned to make society good.

In summary, Ritschl's understanding of the kingdom of God focuses on the activity of God directed toward the freedom of the individual and to the fellowship of the redeemed which results from God's activity; on Christ who as mediator of God's redemption entrusts to the disciples the moral task of expanding the kingdom of God; and on the individual who through redemption is free to give himself to the work of the kingdom of God.¹⁸ It is the organization of humanity through action inspired by love.¹⁹

Johannes Weiss

Weiss made a distinct break with his father-in-law and teacher Albrecht Ritschl concerning his understanding of the kingdom of God. He published The Preaching of Jesus about the Kingdom of God in 1892 and Rudolf Bultmann says of this work:

This epoch-making book refuted the interpretation which was hitherto generally accepted. Weiss showed that the kingdom of God

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁹Ibid.

is not immanent in the world and does not grow as part of the world's history, but is rather eschatological, i.,e., the kingdom of God transcends the historical order. It will come into being not through the moral endeavor of man, but solely through the supernatural action of God. God will suddenly put an end to the world and to history, and He will bring in a new world, the world of eternal blessedness.²⁰

Weiss expressed the belief that there was a gap between Ritschl's understanding of the kingdom of God and the concept as it appeared in the teaching of Jesus. He felt that Ritschl did not develop the implications of Jesus' teaching concerning the kingdom of God as over against the kingdom of Satan as appears in Matthew 12:25ff. He also felt that Ritschl placed too much emphasis on the activity of men in bringing in the kingdom where as in the teaching of Jesus, the emphasis is on the activity of God as king. And finally, he felt that in his understanding of the kingdom of God, Ritschl did not take into account the eschatological nature of the kingdom of God. In Ritschl's view, Jesus begins something that must be developed by the disciples through their moral activity. In this view, persons are drawn together on the basis of their ethical and moral efforts. However, in Jesus' teaching the very opposite is true. The kingdom of God breaks into human affairs and into the world and stands in judgment on all human endeavor.

Thus, Weiss broke with all previous attempts to explicate the kingdom of God as a phenomenon within history. He insisted that in the teaching of Jesus kingdom of God is an apocalyptic concept. In investigating the background of its use by Jesus, he discovered two ways in

²⁰Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology (London: SCM Press, 1960), p. 12.

which the concept was used in ancient Judaism.²¹ The use in ancient Judaism depended upon whether or not the emphasis was placed upon the activity of God as king or upon man as the subject of God's rule.²² The emphasis upon man as the recipient of God's rule was based on the Jewish concept of God as the eternal king. Man could either accept or reject this rule of God. By accepting and submitting to the rule of God, men took upon themselves the yoke of obedience to the kingdom of God. In doing this, a man experiences the kingdom of God as present in his life. Weiss insisted that Jesus' use of the kingdom of God referred back to the ancient Jewish emphasis upon God as ruler. God as ruler breaks into human existence and history to destroy and make new.²³ Man can do nothing to influence or further the kingdom, though he is taught by Jesus to pray for it.²⁴ Jesus is the proclaimer of God's kingdom but God and only God brings it in.²⁵

Having shown that Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God must be seen in the context of Jewish apocalypticism, Weiss developed the idea that Jesus not only proclaimed the kingdom as irrupting into history but that he expected it to occur in the immediate future. Albert Schweitzer was to continue the work of Weiss in this area by seeing the

²¹Norman Perrin, Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 67.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

ethical teachings of Jesus as Interimesthiks, that is valid only until the coming of the kingdom. According to Weiss, Jesus does not differ from his contemporaries by proclaiming the presence of that for which they hoped; rather he proclaimed the nearness and absolute certainty of the coming fulfillment of that hope.²⁶

In contrast to Jewish apocalyptic, Jesus gives no indication of what this new future of God will be like. In his ministry, the new age is dawning, the age of Messianic salvation. But it is not to be simply a restoration of the Davidic kingdom.

With this understanding of the kingdom of God, the ethical teachings of Jesus are clarified. They are not teachings of what must be done in order that the kingdom may come. They indicate what is involved in the repentance that is called for as part of the proclamation of the kingdom. Jesus' teachings show the radical response that is necessary to the breaking in of God's kingdom.

Albert Schweitzer

As stated above, Schweitzer accepts the work of Weiss that kingdom of God is an apocalyptic concept. He did not limit himself simply to the concept kingdom of God as being eschatological but maintained that the whole life of Jesus, all of his teachings, must be seen in the light of Jewish apocalyptic literature of the type found in the period when the book of Daniel was written.

Perrin writes of Schweitzer's view concerning the kingdom of God:

²⁶Perrin, Kingdom of God, p. 20.

The kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus is an apocalyptic conception and its coming is expected in the immediate future. He summarizes with approval the view of Johannes Weiss...."a Kingdom of God which is wholly future; as is indeed implied in the petition of the Lord's Prayer, 'Thy Kingdom Come'....It is present only as a cloud may be said to be present which throws its shadow upon the earth; its nearness, that is to say, is recognized by the paralysis of the kingdom of Satan. In the fact Jesus casts out the demons, the Pharisees are bidden to recognize, according to Matt. 12:25-28, that the Kingdom of God is already upon them."²⁷

According to Schweitzer the sending out of the twelve in Matthew 10 is done so with the belief that Jesus himself is the Messiah. Consequently, he expected the coming of the kingdom within that same year. Since the Parousia and the Messianic woes described in Matthew 10 failed to take place, Jesus determined to force their coming by going to his death in Jerusalem. This way, the Messianic woes that were to precede the coming of the kingdom would be fulfilled and Jesus himself would be designated Son of Man.

Subsequent debate on the kingdom of God has focused on such points as whether or not Jesus understood the kingdom of God as already present in his ministry or wholly futuristic. C. H. Dodd argued for a present realization of the kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus but was not able to maintain this view and later modified it.²⁸ Bultmann argued that the kingdom is a futuristic expectation which wholly determines the present and includes the apocalyptic expectation of God's becoming King through a series of supernatural events he referred to as the eschatological drama. As a part of this drama, the Son of Man will

²⁷Ibid., p. 22.

²⁸Ibid., p. 30.

come, the dead will rise, then the judgment will follow.²⁹ Bultmann proceeded to interpret the imminent future of the kingdom not in temporal terms but existentially. It is future in that it is coming toward man in his present situation and calling for a decision.

As a result of the pioneering work of Ritschl, Weiss and Schweitzer, current biblical scholarship acknowledges that the kingdom of God refers to the activity of God in ruling as King and that the kingdom comes into history as a result of the activity of God. Men can do nothing to accelerate its coming or further it but can only respond to it.

Kingdom of God in Jewish Literature

According to Perrin,³⁰ the roots of our understanding of the kingdom of God as the rule or kingly activity of God on behalf of his people comes out of the near eastern myth of the kingship of God. Before proceeding with a development of this theme, perhaps we should explore the way in which he understands myth.

Perrin relies on three views of myth which come from Bultmann, Eliade and Roccoeur.³¹ In explicating his understanding of myth, Bultmann is indebted to D. F. Strauss who in his The Life of Jesus

²⁹Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus and the Word (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), pp. 38-39.

³⁰Perrin, Jesus and the Language, p. 67.

³¹Norman Perrin, The New Testament: An Introduction (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. 21ff.

Critically Examined was attempting to get beyond the view that the New Testament is factual history. Strauss attempted to transcend the supernaturalist/rationalist approach to the New Testament by defining myth as fundamentally "the narrative expression of an idea".³² As myth, the gospels are "unhistorical stories expressing a series of religious ideas".³³

Following the understanding of myth as set forth by Strauss, Bultmann saw myth as the attempt to express the activity of God in terms of this-worldly categories. To speak mythologically is to talk about the activity of God in the world as an observable phenomenon alongside other phenomena. According to Bultmann, one can speak mythologically about the activity of God in the world if by that one understands God's activity as not interrupting world history or events but as happening within them, "hidden from every eye except the eye of Faith".³⁴ Thus, we can say that a myth is not true or false but effective or ineffective.

The second view of myth comes from Mircea Eliade and sees myth as the narration of sacred history. Through ritual, one re-enacts the myth. This understanding of myth can be seen in the celebration of Passover and the Lord's Supper. In the celebration of Passover, each Jew is to see himself as directly involved in the Exodus. In the Lord's Supper, the Christian participates in the reality of Christ's death on

³²Ibid., p. 22.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 62.

the cross. There is also a future dimension involved in that the Jews on Passover look toward the coming of Elijah as Christians look toward the return of Christ.

A third view of myth comes from Paul Ricoeur as he focuses on the meaning of primary symbols. In attempting to express a sense of sin, he says man reverts to symbolic language. Just as the symbol flag points beyond itself to the deeper meaning and experience, the symbol sin points to the myth of Jesus dying on the cross and as such myth here is a narrative account which interprets the symbol.

With these understandings of myth as a background, Perrin quotes a definition of myth from Alan Watts:

Myth is to be defined as a complex of stories—some no doubt fact, and some fantasy—which, for various reasons, human beings regard as demonstrations of the inner meaning of the universe and of human life.³⁵

The myth of God acting as King was taken over from the Canaanites where it goes back to the Sumerians.³⁶ In the Israelite understanding, the myth of God's kingship brings together two traditions. The one tradition coming from the ancient eastern myth celebrates the god, who has acted as king in creating the world and continues to do so by annually renewing the earth and shows himself to be the king of a particular people by sustaining them in the world.³⁷ Perrin points out that the myth functioned in the lives of all peoples in the ancient near east, only the god changes; Marduk is the

³⁵Perrin, Jesus and the Language, p. 22.

³⁶Ibid., p. 16.

³⁷Ibid., p. 17.

Babylonian king; Asshur in Assyria and in Israel Yahweh is king.³⁸

The myth celebrated the victory of God over his enemies by the renewal of earth each spring symbolizing God's victory over the primeval monster. In renewing the earth, the people experienced the activity of God on their behalf as King.

The enthronement Psalms celebrate the activity of Yahweh on behalf of the Israelites. Perrin says that the constant refrain "Yahweh has become king" is a more accurate translation than "The Lord Reigns".³⁹

Yahweh has become king; he is robed in majesty;
Yahweh is robed, he is girded with strength.
Yea, the world is established, it shall not be moved;
thy throne is established from of old;
thou art from everlasting. (Psalm 93:1-2)⁴⁰

Yahweh has become king; let the earth rejoice;
let the many coastlands be glad!
Clouds and the thick darkness are round about him;
righteousness and justice are the foundations of his throne.
(Psalm 97:1-2)⁴¹

With the emphasis upon righteousness and justice in the above Psalm we see the other element of the tradition which the Israelites inherited. Perrin calls this the "amphictyonic Heilsgeschichte",⁴² God's saving activity at significant moments in their history. Righteousness and justice are part of the covenant tradition having been a part of the Israelite tradition before the adoption of the myth of the

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., p. 18.

kingship of God. Perrin notes that the Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad introduced the idea of salvation history already present "in the days of tribal confederacy (amphictyony)".⁴³ The idea appears in Deuteronomy 26:5b-9 and is a Credo which emphasizes God's activity on behalf of the people and includes the wandering of the Patriarchs, the promise of the land Canaan, the descent into Egypt, the deliverance from Egypt, the wanderings in the wilderness and the inheritance of the land of promise. Quoting Mowinckel from The Psalms in Israel's Worship, Perrin agrees that the concept of Yahweh as king could not have been taken over until they themselves had a king.⁴⁴

With the bringing together of these two traditions--the myth of God acting as king in creation and its renewal and the myth of Salvation History with the emphasis on God's activity on behalf of the Israelites at decisive moments in their history, the symbol kingdom of God emerges.⁴⁵ Perrin insists that kingdom of God is a symbol in the understanding of symbol used by Ricoeur. The symbol arises out of the kingship of God myth and evokes the myth of God's activity on their behalf in creation and at other significant moments in their history (salvation history). In our previous understanding of myth, it functions to interpret the historical experience of the Israelites.

In reality, the historical situation of the Jews was such that the myth of God acting on their behalf had to be reinterpreted by the prophets in light of the various catastrophes that befell them.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 80.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 20.

The catastrophes were seen by the prophets as God's judgment for the failure of the people to remain true to God. By the time of the first century B.C., when the Romans had conquered Palestine under Pompey and the Jews had lost their short-lived period of independence under the Maccabees, the myth took on the language of apocalyptic. In the Assumption of Moses, the myth assumes cosmological dimensions:

And then his (God's) kingdom shall appear
 throughout his creation,
 And then Satan shall be no more,
 And sorrow shall depart with him.

For the Heavenly One will arise from his
 royal throne,
 And he will go forth from his holy habitation
 With indignation and wrath on account of his sons.

For the most High will arise, the Eternal God
 alone,
 And he will appear to punish the Gentiles
 Then thou, O Israel, shalt be happy.

And God will exalt thee,
 And he will cause thee to approach the
 heaven of the stars.⁴⁶

During this time, there appeared a form of this apocalyptic hope in which by starting a war with Rome, it was expected that God would intervene, destroy the Gentiles and create a world in which "Satan and sin will be no more".⁴⁷ This idea is found in the war scroll from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

By the time of Jesus, the myth of God's intervention on behalf of the people was deeply ingrained in the consciousness of the Jewish

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 26.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 28.

people as the people of God, and had taken on apocalyptic elements.

Kingdom of God as Proclaimed by Jesus

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that the kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus was not an invention on his part or a new teaching. Contrary to apocalyptic speculation, Jesus refrained from giving a detailed picture of what life would be like in the age to come. He limited himself to the proclamation that in his life and ministry, the kingdom of God is breaking into history and that men must be prepared to face the coming judgment as a part of the kingdom.

Jesus envisaged that the coming of the kingdom was imminent as evidenced by the signs and miracles which he performed, i.e., the casting out of demons and healing of the sick and lame. The inauguration of the kingdom will be accompanied by a tremendous cosmic drama with the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds, the resurrection of the dead and the day of judgment.

In one of the authentic kingdom sayings of Jesus, Luke 17:20f, we see further evidence for the fact that Jesus rejected the apocalyptic understanding of history for a prophetic understanding. The Revised Standard Version translates:

The Kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.⁴⁸

Perrin argues that the New English Bible translation "the kingdom of God is among you" is to be preferred. The other possibility

⁴⁸Luke 17:20b-21 (RSV).

would be "the kingdom of God is within you". This Greek phrase entos hymon can be used either way but if it is translated within you it has no other parallel in the teaching of Jesus.⁴⁹ This carries more weight for the translation "the kingdom of God is among you" even though the context of the passage is probably editorial.⁵⁰

The prophetic view of history has its roots in the ancient Jewish understanding of the kingly activity of God. As we have seen the hope of God's intervention in history in a final and dramatic way was based on the certainty that God had already acted decisively in Israel's past. Even in the time of national catastrophe, God was acting as judge in these calamities and the challenge to Israel was to repent. The emphasis here is not on history as a series of events leading to a climax but the emphasis is on the activity of God. History gets its importance not from any inherent unity but simply because God is seen as active in creating the conditions for historical existence.

In the apocalyptic view of history, there is a continuity which began with Adam and continues to move toward a final end. Historical events are important in and of themselves because they are seen as a fulfillment of the divine plan. Therefore, apocalyptists look to historical events for signs which give some clue as to when the end will take place. The assumption here is that individuals have access to a divine plan and as a result, can determine the signs which signify the end.

⁴⁹Perrin, Kingdom of God, pp. 175-176.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 176.

In the prophetic view one does not have access to a divine plan but encounters the activity of God which gives meaning to history. History has no meaning apart from the activity of God.

Jesus rejected the apocalyptic view of history in that he refused to give or look for signs and he chose the expression "kingdom of God" with its emphasis on God's activity as King as opposed to apocalyptic expressions such as the age to come or the consummation.⁵¹

Having said that Jesus denies the kingdom of God as being present as an observable phenomenon, i.e., war, persecution or any such historical occurrence, what can be meant by Jesus' use of the phrase "the kingdom of God is among you". Perrin says:

The answer is found in the natural antithesis to historical events at the level of kings, wars, and persecutions---namely, historical events at the level of human experience of life in the world. To say "the kingdom of God is among you" is to say that it is a "matter of human experience" or a mediated "experience of existential reality". This is what it means to move from "signs to be observed" to something that is "in the midst of you".⁵²

With this understanding of the kingdom of God being among us as a matter of human experience, the way is open to appropriate the meaning of the kingdom of God as the activity of God in human experience and gives a way of speaking of the activity of God as present today in human experience where people have the eyes to see and the ears to hear.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 178.

⁵²Perrin, New Testament, p. 290.

Kingdom of God in the Parables of Jesus

It is in the parables that we see the way the Kingdom of God breaks into human experience. Some of the parables function as proclamation and some as parenesis, that is they teach or instruct. The parables or any of the teachings of Jesus are always to be seen in the light of his proclamation of the kingdom of God.

This approach to the parables and other sayings of Jesus had enabled New Testament scholars to isolate parables as parables of Jesus as opposed to the allegorizing tendency which developed in the church's use of them, i.e., the parable of the sower in Mark 4:3-8 with the allegorical interpretation contained in Mark 4:14-20. Without the allegorical interpretation, in the light of the proclamation of the kingdom of God it becomes a parable calling for confidence in God's future. The consummation is related to the ministry of Jesus as seed-time is to harvest. When allegorized each part of the parable takes on a particular meaning.

The parable of the Good Samaritan has traditionally been seen as an exemplary story, illustrating the principle of neighborliness. This is in keeping with the practice of Rabbis. Through the insights of John Dominic Crossan, we are reminded that if it were only an exemplary story it would be better to have the Samaritan as the victim and the Israelite as the neighbor.⁵³ With the focal point being the Good Samaritan, Crossan says it confronts the hearers of Jesus to conceive

⁵³Ibid., p. 292.

the inconceivable: Good plus Samaritan.⁵⁴ His argument is:

The literal point confronted the hearers with the necessity of saying the impossible and having their world turned upside down and radically questioned in its presuppositions. The metaphorical point is that just so does the Kingdom of God break abruptly into a person's consciousness and demand the overturn of prior values, closed options, set judgments, and established conclusions....The hearer struggling with the dualism Good Samaritan is actually experiencing in and through this the in-breaking of the Kingdom upon him. Not only does it happen like this, it happens in this.⁵⁵

Paranetic parables such as the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Matt. 13:44-46 or other paranetical sayings such as Luke 9:62 or Mark 7:15 when interpreted in the light of the proclamation of the kingdom of God point to the response that is necessary when one accepts the reality of the kingdom. Here again, the emphasis of Jesus' teaching is not on the accomplishment of human activity but on the activity of God.

As Albert Schweitzer found in his Quest of the Historical Jesus, it is impossible to come up with a picture of the historical Jesus from New Testament accounts. As stated above, what can be said about Jesus, is that he proclaimed the kingdom of God. He also had the power to mediate to his hearers the existential reality of that which he proclaimed.⁵⁶ But from the situation in the life of Jesus to the New Testament itself the one who proclaimed the kingdom of God became the one who was proclaimed.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 293.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 301.

Summary

It was stated at the beginning of this chapter that we have seen a move toward a recovery of a genuine biblical theology. Through a look at theological trends we have seen how theology moved from Greek categories based on human reason to Hebrew categories based on God's self-disclosure. This culminated in the work of Karl Barth who called for a return to biblical sources as the starting point for doing theology.

Beginning with the thought of Schleiermacher, we have seen a move toward the understanding of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God as embodying not a reality that grows within the world but as the activity of God breaking into human existence. One does not add to or take from its development. One is called to respond in obedience to God's activity. What is revealed in God's rule that is breaking in is not a truth or truths about history that enables one to see history as a whole moving toward a climax as in the apocalyptic view of history, but the presence of God who stands outside of history, to be sure, appearing in history but from within the events of history visible only to the eyes of faith.

Our knowledge of God is based on God's revelation perceived through the eyes of faith. We know because we are known.

CHAPTER IV

GESTALT THERAPY AS A WAY OF INTEGRATING
THE THEOLOGY OF PREACHING AND COUNSELING

It was noted in the introduction to this project that often a gap exists between what a minister preaches and how he/she goes about the task of counseling people. There is a theological inconsistency when a pastor proclaims the good news of God's saving activity toward persons as a free gift and then in his/her counseling proceeds as though persons can work out their own salvation. At another level, the inconsistency is seen in that a pastor may preach out of a context of cross/resurrection theology and then counsel in the context of the latest "pop" psychology that promises instant happiness. It is not a matter of being either an Augustinian or a Pelagian. It is a matter of realizing and integrating into one's preaching and counseling the insight of T. W. Manson, "Salvation may be free, but it is not cheap".¹

With the plethora of counseling styles and types that came forth in the sixties along with the human potential movement, pastors have not kept pace theologically. In many instances, one became a "transactional analyst", a "reality therapist", a "Rogerian" or a "Gestaltist" without any kind of theological reflection on the meaning of faith and what this implies for pastoral care.

The focus of this chapter will be to see Gestalt Therapy as a way of grounding one's preaching and counseling in a common biblical

¹Norman Perrin, The New Testament: An Introduction (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. 295.

theology growing out of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God. A counseling model will be explored in the context of the way Jesus ministered to persons.

Gestalt Therapy: A Bridge Between Preaching and Counseling

Preaching is defined as that event whereby a person hears in the proclamation of the Word, God's address in his/her person existence and in this event receives freedom in order that he/she might turn from the world and be responsible to God. Responsible is used here in the sense of response-able, implying a relationship of trust and openness before God, with the ability to respond to God. Preaching then is not calling persons to adopt a set of beliefs or assent to certain dogmatic statements concerning faith, but is to proclaim the Word of God's turning to the world in Christ in such a way that persons are called to repentance by turning from the world as a source of security and turning to God who creates and makes new. For Jesus, this activity of God on behalf of persons and the world was described as the kingdom of God. The church through the writings of Paul was to interpret this incorporation into the kingdom of God's rule as a process of dying to self and being reborn "in Christ".

Eric Hunter Beaumont² has shown the relationship between the process of dying to self and being reborn in Christ as the same process of death and rebirth that one experiences in the resolution of the impasse in Gestalt Therapy.

²Eric Hunter Beaumont, "Gestalt Therapy Impasse Resolution as a Religious Process", Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, School of Theology at Claremont, 1976.

Paul refers to man in his existence as man as soma. Somatic existence is simply human existence. Man is confronted by God's commandment to seek life. In seeking life, man attempts to save himself. In the process, he becomes divorced from himself. He does not have the power to give himself life. His life becomes a contradiction and this existence is referred to by Paul as "walking according to the flesh". In the letter to the Romans he writes:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So that it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me....
For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members.³

In the proclamation of the kingdom of God as God's rule breaking into human existence, creating a new possibility for man, a way out of this dilemma is found. It involves a paradox as expressed by Jesus:

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.⁴

Nothing a person can do is capable of lifting him/her out of this predicament. God's saving action in Christ sets him/her free. In the event of preaching one hears and responds to a new possibility of existence. Knowledge of the facts concerning the life of Jesus do not constitute one's salvation. Existentially, one must experience God's word of judgment on all his/her attempts to create life (dying to self),

³Romans 7:15-17; 22-23 (RSV).

⁴Mark 8:34b-35 (RSV).

and at the same time experience the surrender of his/her previous self-understanding as self-justification by outward means, i.e., the law. One dies to self and is reborn into a new mode of existence described as being "in Christ".

This existence in sin which Paul refers to as "walking according to the flesh" has its parallel in Gestalt therapy as neurosis. Neurotic existence is fragmented existence. In an attempt to create his/her existence the "I" becomes fragmented, split off from itself. The "I" creates the "not-I" and seeks to exclude this from the field of experience. In turn the "I" takes in or introjects from the environment and creates what Perls called the "phony" person who behaves according to what others expect of him/her. Here we can see the dilemma which Paul experienced. The person experiences internal conflict and is constantly attempting to manipulate others to meet his/her needs. Healthy figure/ground formation which is a result of good contact does not occur because he/she is not in contact with the environment or others but only his/her distorted view of them. In this situation, he/she has no sense of self.

In Gestalt Therapy, the way out of this dilemma is found in what is called impasse resolution. When one becomes aware of the way he/she is interrupting the life process by attempting to create life through hanging on to unfinished situations, he/she is in the impasse. Aware of the limitations of the phony existence, the "I" is not ready to surrender its role and enter the process of responsible living. At this point between the loss of environmental support and the inability to find self-support, the person is faced with the fear of death.

When the individual is willing to remain in the impasse, there is a breakthrough into awareness and the experience of being re-connected to life. A new situation is created. The previous field of experience is now recreated. One exists in a new situation. One is a new creation. In this case, knowledge is not insight as to why one behaves in a certain way, but is of the "aha" kind that can say, "I was lost, and I have come to myself".

Implications for Preaching

With this understanding of preaching and its parallel in Gestalt Therapy, the way is open to see how preaching and counseling are interrelated. Both preaching and counseling are to be seen in the light of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God. They are not really two separate functions though the time and place and method for doing each will vary. Certainly a most healthy implication for preaching is to deliver the understanding of preaching from being seen as that which takes place in a pulpit on Sunday morning. With Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God as breaking into human existence, preaching occurs wherever that event is witnessed to in such a way that a person hears God's claim on his/her existence.

In this way of thinking, preaching is an event of proclaiming a new possibility for persons. It is that event which does not call attention to itself but points beyond itself to the God who is breaking into human existence and making all things new. To proclaim the Word of God is not to talk about God or the Bible or faith but to speak as God's ambassador in such a way that people hear a new possibility for

themselves. To say "God is love" is not to say anything about the essence or attributes of God but is to say that God in freedom is turning to the world in love and making it possible for persons to respond by loving each other in their concrete existence.

It is not the task of the minister as proclaimer of the good news to convince or argue persons into a response by manipulation. He/she witnesses to the event of God's activity and allows God to call persons to a life of faith.

Implications for Pastoral Counseling

If preaching is the proclamation of a new possibility of existence, then it would appear that pastoral counseling in order to be consistent must be also done in this framework. The role of the pastor as counselor is to be an enabler in assisting persons clarify and understand their existence in the world vis-a-vis God and others. By dealing with the here and now of a person's existence, he/she can discover through the therapeutic process how he/she manipulates the environment and others and gets caught in fragmented existence.

I believe that there is a way for a pastoral counselor to make use of the methods in Gestalt Therapy and be consistent with biblical theology found in Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God. I will deal with three functions in counseling which are inherent in the way Jesus dealt with persons. These three functions in counseling are: the awareness function, the enabling function and the supportive function.

Awareness function. It is obvious from many of the parables that Jesus noticed and made genuine, healthy contact with others and his environment. The parable of the sower (Mark 4:3-8) describes an actual situation that Jesus would have seen on several occasions. He is aware of the needs of the crowd in the story of the feeding of the four thousand in Mark 8:1ff, and also of the feeding of the five thousand in Mark 6:34ff. He notices the large crowd and is aware that they are hungry and out of this contact and awareness provides for them.

Being in healthy contact with reality in the form of his understanding of God, Jesus was transparent before others in his relationship to God and before God in his compassion and concern for others.

This awareness enabled Jesus to have a clear sense of who he was as opposed to others. He never hesitated to confront persons when they were trying to justify their self-centered behavior. The story of the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17ff) who came up and referred to him as "Good Teacher" continues with Jesus reminding him of the fact that no one deserves to be called good except God.

Jesus is aware of and notices the poor of the land. The blind man of Luke 18:35ff cries out to him and is rebuked by those around him. Jesus notices and commands them to bring the blind man to him and heals him.

Jesus was aware of the situation with regard to women. He has compassion and notices the woman caught in adultery. People's needs are more important than laws.

Jesus' awareness was manifest in an openness toward persons. He responds to the sinful woman who anoints his feet (Luke 7:36ff) with

gentleness and love. At the same time, he does not hesitate to confront his host who is critical of his acceptance of this act of love. He gladly offers forgiveness in response to her act of faith.

A pastoral counselor needs to have spontaneous contact and openness toward others. This requires that a pastor have a good sense of self as opposed to others. Most of the people a pastor will see are not in contact with life in the here and now but are usually living out of the past and out of their fantasies. As Jesus responded to persons by paying attention and noticing them, an effective pastoral counselor can do no less.

Enabling function. As one who proclaimed the breaking in of the rule of God, Jesus functioned in his relationship with others as an enabler. This can be seen in the call of the disciples and in his relationship with them. Obviously, all the stories having to do with the healing of persons illustrate this enabling function of Jesus' ministry. People are enabled to function as whole persons free of whatever crippling disease they might have had. The call of the disciples (Matt. 4:18ff) is so that they might become fishers of men. Jesus deals with the impetuous disciple, Peter, with gentleness as he calls him a rock, in spite of the fact that Peter understands his role as Messiah.

People are enabled and encouraged to discover the talents they have and use them wisely and faithfully. In this, persons are encouraged to use their talents responsibly no matter how small or insignificant they might seem. (Matt. 25:14ff)

Jesus enables persons by confronting them with a new possibility of existence. He doesn't rescue them or do for them what they can and

must do for themselves. The story of the rich young man which appears in Luke 18:18-30 shows Jesus confronting the man with a new possibility of living in the world. When the man is confronted with the either/or of riches or the kingdom of God he apparently chooses his wealth. Jesus doesn't attempt to talk him into choosing for the kingdom. The new possibility has been given the man and Jesus leaves him to make his decision.

A pastoral counselor is an enabler. He/she does not rescue persons or relieve them of facing the consequences of the choices they have made. Through awareness, persons are enabled to move from dependence to autonomy.

Supportive function. Many of Jesus' teachings illustrate this function (Luke 12:22ff). Aware of the anxiety of his followers, Jesus teaches them not to be anxious. The birds neither sow nor reap yet God cares for them. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:32)

Jesus shows his care and concern for Zacchaeus, a tax collector. (Luke 19:1ff) He knows that he is not the most well-liked person around but calls to him to come down and accompanies him to his house.

He encourages and supports those who in their poverty give all they have. The poor widow with the gift of all she had is praised. (Luke 21:1-4)

Support does not indicate that Jesus accepted every kind of behavior. On occasion, he did not hesitate to confront people with their behavior. He was content to point out their behavior without

being judgmental toward them. In the story of the Publican and the Pharisee (Luke 18:9ff), Jesus simply lets the action of the Pharisee bring its own judgment. The Publican in praying for mercy is justified. That's the truth of the matter even though it may rebuke the Pharisee.

Similarly, a pastoral counselor needs to observe the truth in love. Loving persons is not to be equated with sentimentality. Much of what passes in the name of love is not supportive of a person's growth but only functions to keep them dependent. No matter in what circumstances people find themselves they must not be rescued from the necessity of their making a choice as to how they want to proceed. In offering support as people move from dependence to autonomy, the pastor does so in the knowledge that God's presence is actively undergirding all of life in the form of love.

Summary

Gestalt Therapy can serve as a way of integrating a theology of preaching and counseling. The aim of therapy as enabling a person to move from dependency to autonomy is consistent with the way Jesus dealt with persons. In each instance, a person receives the gift of life from beyond either the fragmented "I" of neurotic existence or from the God who is breaking into human existence with a call to turn from the world. By being aware and supportive, the pastoral counselor enables people to respond to the call of God's kingdom in fullness and joy.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Gestalt Therapy in and of itself makes no religious claims. On occasion, Fritz Perls attached the tendency of the Christian faith under the influence of Greek modes of thought to view the soul as a kind of substance inhabiting the body.

In spite of the fact that Gestalt Therapy has been considered and remains a type of therapy within the human potential movement, one cannot fail to see the parallels between the aim of therapy as leading a person to their death in order that he/she might experience a rebirth into authentic existence and that of the Christian faith as dying to self and being born to a new life in Christ.

In the preceding chapters, I have sought to establish that there is an epistemological similarity between Gestalt Therapy and Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God as breaking into the world. In both instances, knowledge is not of the structural type so that one looks for facts or understanding that fit the structure. Knowledge in this instance is process. It involves an ongoing process through which one is incorporated into an experience of reality that is not static but dynamic and alive. Truth does not inhere in propositions or statements, but is encountered in the relation between self, the world and others.

In Gestalt Therapy, through awareness, one comes to experience how he/she stands in the way of healthy contact with others and the environment. In the process of moving from neurotic existence to wholeness or authentic existence he/she encounters the phobias and fears with

their threat of death and nothingness. By remaining in the experience he/she dies to the past and becomes alive in the here and now open to all the possibilities that present themselves to awareness.

In Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God, the hearer is invited to submit to the rule of God and become incorporated into a new mode of existence that is not merely an outgrowth of the past. One experiences the in-breaking of God's rule as judgment upon his/her past and at the same time receives the freedom to live in the present with the past forgiven and also open to the future that God will bring about. The kingdom of God is not within history as an observable phenomenon, identified with the movements in history, but is available only to those who see through the eyes of faith. One lives in the tension of the kingdom as both realized and yet to come. In the proclamation of Jesus, one is confronted with the demand of the kingdom and is faced with the decision either to take up one's life and move into authentic existence or remain trapped in the inauthentic existence of the past with no future.

Knowledge involves being incorporated into a new mode of existence as responsible existence understood, as I am responsible for the choices I make.

Theological Implications

For too long, theology has been done in abstraction. God has been thought of in terms growing out of Greek philosophy. In this understanding, God is seen as static and self-contained. This kind of understanding of God has tended to see God as a Deus ex machina, who

is not active within the world but who occasionally will intervene in the world in some miraculous way.

The Gestalt understanding of life as process opens the way to recover the Hebrew understanding of God and reality as also being dynamic and alive process. In this way, we can move from conceiving life atomistically to life as interrelated.

A belief in the existence of God is not the criterion of faith. The God that can be proved and boxed-in is the static God of Greek philosophy and human reason. It would appear to be true that the "death of God" theologians were accurate in proclaiming the death of this static deity. The criterion of faith in the Hebraic mode of existence is the God who seeks out persons and encounters them in their concrete existence and calls them to new life. You cannot argue for the existence of this kind of reality. You witness to the event of God's coming. You proclaim a new possibility as the result of God's entering the world in Jesus.

Epistemological Implications

As was noted above, the Freudian approach to counseling tended to view life atomistically. The approach was not self-in-relation but self-in-isolation. This was a carry over from Greek modes of thought which viewed life atomistically or substantially. Human beings have an essence which is prior to and more real than existence.

Gestalt Therapy opens a way out of this impasse. The givenness of concrete human existence is more real than any idea about the essence of human nature. This means that counseling can become more

existential. Phenomenology as that which displays itself can also be incorporated in the counseling situation in a meaningful way.

In this way, one knows oneself as self-in-relation, self-in-the world. As self-in-the world, the ego which previously was seen as a substance becomes a function of identifying at the contact boundary that which is "I" and that which is "not-I".

In the proclamation of the word, we encounter the call to deny self and follow. This has been taken to mean a depreciation of self. However, if we understand the self as self-in-relation, ever aware and open to change and growth, then it is important to be thoroughly grounded in self, knowing who I am as opposed to who you are. I cannot make a choice that I can affirm if I don't have the awareness that I am the one who is choosing. In following God's call, I am not denying a part of myself but simply affirming a choice I have made. I know myself as active, dynamic, as choosing self.

Methodological Implications

Gestalt Therapy with its emphasis on the ongoing process, the here and now of behavior provides a method for seeing counseling as assisting persons to discover their own strength and resources as they move from dependency to autonomy.

In preaching as well as counseling, clergy are always tempted to foster the dependency needs of persons. It gives one a false sense of security to be needed. In this way, the proclamation of the good news as a call to take responsibility for one's own life and behavior is diminished. Instead of helping persons own their self-defeating

behavior, we end up by rationalizing and excusing their behavior.

A minister can make use of the Gestalt understanding of the impasse as being the key to growth. Instead of avoiding the impasse, the therapist will seek to lead the person into the impasse and keep them there until he/she discovers how he/she keeps choosing to be stuck. The therapist does not attempt to help the person by leading him/her away from the impasse.

At the heart of the Christian faith is the cross. Crucifixion, death and resurrection is the order. The response that is demanded to the proclamation of the kingdom of God involves the dying to one's previous existence in order to embrace the new. Since we live out of the resurrection event, we need not be afraid to allow person's to experience their own psychological death knowing that life comes out of death.

Summary

The thesis of this paper has been that Gestalt Therapy shares a common epistemology with Jesus' Proclamation of the kingdom of God. Knowledge has been shown to be, in both instances, of the kind that incorporates persons into a new mode of existence vis-a-vis God, self and the world. With this understanding of the way one comes to knowledge, I believe I can conclude that Gestalt Therapy does provide a way of integrating a theology of preaching and counseling.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Gestalt Therapy and Psychology

- Beaumont, E. H. "Gestalt Therapy Impasse Resolution as a Religious Process". Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, School of Theology at Claremont, 1976.
- Fagan, Joen, and Irma Lee Shepherd. Gestalt Therapy Now. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books, 1970; New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- Frankl, Viktor E. The Unconscious God. New York: Simon and Schuster: 1948.
- Harris, Thomas A., M.D. I'm Ok--You're Ok: A Practical Guide to Transactional Analysis. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.
- Hatcher, Chris, and Philip Himelstein, (eds.) The Handbook of Gestalt Therapy. New York: Aronson, 1976.
- Latner, Joel. The Gestalt Therapy Book. New York: Julian Press, 1973; Bantam, 1974.
- Perls, F. S. Ego, Hunger and Aggression. London: Allen & Unwin, 1947; New York: Random House, 1969.
- . Gestalt Therapy Verbatim. Moab, UT: Real People Press, 1969.
- . In and Out of the Garbage Pail. Moab, UT: Real People Press, 1969; New York: Bantam, 1971.
- . The Gestalt Approach and Eye Witness to Therapy. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books, 1973.
- . et al. Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality. New York: Julian Press, 1951; Dell, 1965.
- Polster, E., and M. Gestalt Therapy Integrated. New York: Random House, 1974.
- Shostrom, E. L. Man, the Manipulator. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967; New York: Bantam, 1968.
- Stevens, Barry. Don't Push the River. Moab, UT: Real People Press, 1975.
- Stevens, J. O. Awareness: Exploring, Experimenting, Experiencing, Moab, UT: Real People Press, 1971.
- . (ed.) Gestalt Is. Moab, UT: Real People Press, 1975.

Walker, J. L. Body and Soul: Gestalt Therapy and Religious Experience. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971.

Pastoral Care and Counseling

Adams, J. L., and S. Hiltner. Pastoral Care in the Liberal Churches. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970.

Brister, C. W. Pastoral Care in the Church. New York: Harper & Row, 1964.

_____. The Promise of Counseling: Opportunities for the Minister. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978.

Browning, Don S. The Moral Context of Pastoral Care. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976.

_____. "New Trends in Pastoral Care: The Search for Method in Religious Living". Christian Century, XC, 31 (September 5, 1973), 849-51.

Clebsch, William A., and Charles R. Jaekle. Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964.

Clinebell, Howard J., Jr. Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966.

Knights, Ward A., Jr. "Gestalt Therapy and Pastoral Counseling". Pastoral Counselor, V, 1 (Spring 1967), 16-21.

McNeill, John T. A History of the Cure of Souls. New York: Harper & Row, 1951.

Oden, Thomas C. Kerygma and Counseling. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966.

Olsen, Peder. Pastoral Care and Psychotherapy. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961.

New Testament and Theology

Barrett, William. Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy. New York: Doubleday, 1962.

Barth, Karl. Dogmatics in Outline. New York: Harper & Row, 1959.

_____. The Epistle to the Romans. trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns. London: Oxford University Press, 1933.

- Bultmann, Rudolf. Existence & Faith. Cleveland: Meridan, 1960.
- . Jesus and the Word. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958.
- . Jesus Christ and Mythology. London: SCM Press, 1960.
- . Theology of the New Testament. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951.
- Crossan, John Dominic. In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.
- Jeremias, Joachim. The Parables of Jesus. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962.
- . Rediscovering the Parables. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966.
- Perrin, Norman. Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976.
- . The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963.
- . The New Testament: An Introduction. New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1974.